



UNRECONCILED SPACES: A POETICS OF INCARCERATION

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UNRECONCILED SPACES: A POETICS OF INCARCERATION

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an urban narrative that seeks to decipher America's prison system as it has been realized through the practice of architecture. By reading the texts of carceral architecture through its many representational forms—drawings of plan, elevation and section; actual buildings; paintings and photographs of those buildings—this essay works to disassemble tacit assumptions concerning America's ideological validation of the prison system. America's founding fathers theorized a new prison system through autonomous political and architectural discourses. Eventual prison practices that emerged from theories of prison reform contrasted greatly with initial reform principles. In part, this essay exposes the ways in which America's penal theorists used architecture to manufacture and reify the treatment of a criminal class. As penal theories became a material reality, part of the plan was to create an intrinsic architectural design that could operate clandestinely, rendering certain practices invisible. Furthermore, it was the division between actual buildings, and preceding discourses about building, and the ways in which these two realms reciprocally supported one another, that enabled a shift in ideology, making prison space common, universal and necessary.

A successful city can be defined in part by how efficiently its rulers organize its citizens. America's early efforts to discover better ways to organize bodies produced a new type of carceral environment. Building a better prison meant building a better city, which in turn meant building a better nation. Philadelphia's battle with New York for urban supremacy included a contest to build the best prison. Prison

architecture as a sign of urban supremacy suggests that a city can be read not just in its architectural splendor but also in its degree of success in the context of social control.

Philadelphia understood its new prison architecture to be a refinement of what had previously existed. I insist that penal reform, expressed through Philadelphia's institutionalization of spatial segregation, was in no way a fine-tuning of social discipline. Rather than honing the techniques of social discipline, prisons and penitentiaries were ruptures in a productive social structure. Builders of America's first prisons and penitentiaries mobilized in space a new reality. As a result of consistent failures over the past two hundred years, America's prison system needs to be addressed in a profound way. This essay begins in a small way to correct what has become a systemic social mistake. I am demonstrating how architects unwittingly participated in faulty ideological formation, and I am suggesting that architects now sever themselves from this fatal trajectory.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Byron Suber is originally from New Orleans, Louisiana. At present, he is a Senior Lecturer at Cornell University in the Department of Theatre, Film and Dance. Suber's work in performance studies encompasses practice, theory, history and criticism. He is a choreographer, playwright, musician and performer. His creative work has been performed extensively in the United States and Europe. He is also a scholar in the fields of performance studies, media studies, history of architecture and urban development. His recent scholarly work focuses on the United States, Western Europe and North Africa. In 1999, he began the study of architectural history that in part has culminated in the production of this thesis. Suber understands the study of architecture to be parallel to his already extensive explorations of spatiality in the field of performance, particularly bodily movement and dance. Suber also directs a European and North African summer-abroad program through Cornell University. This program is interdisciplinary and combines all of his interests as described above with social theory, cultural studies and visual studies.

This thesis is dedicated to John David Rhodes and Chris Sturr

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PREFACE

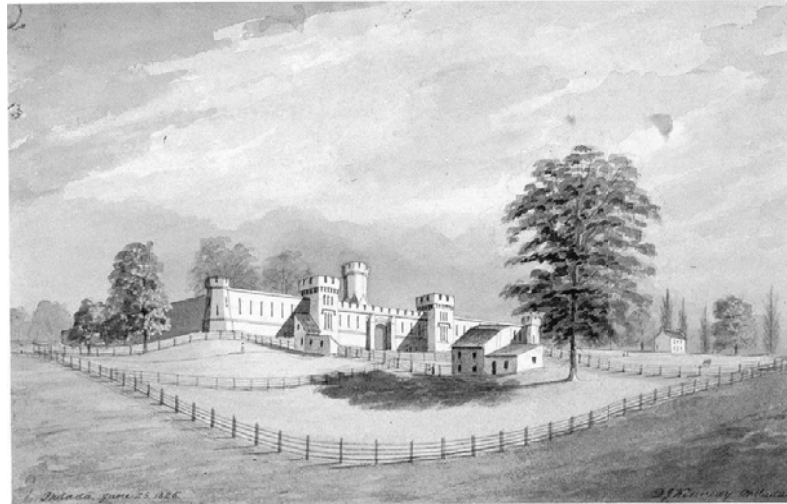


Figure 1. *Cherry Hill*.

Founded in 1823, and though not yet completed, this prison began partial operation in 1829 on the site of a former cherry orchard, hence the nickname “Cherry Hill.” As pastoral a scene as this engraving suggests and as pastoral an environment as its nickname insinuates, what this site has represented, what it has enacted, what it has produced and what it continues to produce in American culture is far from pastoral. It has been and continues to be a performance of complete failure in its attempts at social reform metonymically reflecting larger scaled failures within the process of forming a uniquely American ideology. The engraving is by David Johnston Kennedy (1816/17-1898) titled, *Eastern State Penitentiary, Coats Street, Philadelphia, founded in May 1823, c. 1840*. Watercolor, 6 ¾ x 10 1/8”. Held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It was made after a previous engraving, *A Correct View of Eastern State Penitentiary*, published in *Atkinson’s Casket*, vol. 2, 1827.¹

In the title of this thesis, *UNRECONCILED SPACES: A POETICS OF INCARCERATION*, I employ an intentionally provocative use of the term “poetics.” I am commenting on and expanding Gaston Bachelard’s use of the word in the title of his book, *A Poetics of Space*.² While Bachelard is suggesting a universal understanding of spatial analysis, his work focuses on a particularly privileged space,

¹ Norman Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary, Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1994), 17.

² Gaston Bachelard, *A Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

that of ideal Victorian bourgeois domestic space. I am interested in chronicling what is a neglected domestic space, that of a prison or penitentiary. A prison is an institution but it is also a home to those who live there, whether they are prisoners or employees of the prison. In the context of a prison, the nooks, crannies and tightly enclosed spaces of Bachelard's magical Victorian home take on very different meanings.

Also, I am using the term "unreconciled" to suggest that prison spaces, while extremely problematic, are not completely irreconcilable spaces but rather these spaces have the potential to be reconciled, not through reform but through elimination, therefore in this essay: unreconciled = yet to be reconciled. This concept emerged from sensations I experienced standing in numerous prison spaces. Particularly in Eastern State Penitentiary (Figure 1), due to the design and the ideological implications, I perceived beyond visual perception the unresolved nature of those spaces.

Another term that may need explanation is my use of the term "failure." I will state in the beginning of this essay that prisons fail. When I write of failure I am looking not to the success or failure of prisons architecturally or as isolated institutions. While I have searched in vain for the demographic that benefits from this system, I am less interested in how the malfunctions of the prison system have served interests that support a racist, sexist and class-antagonistic society. I am more interested in positing that prisons do not serve our culture within any sustainable moral economy. It is in holistic terms that I adamantly insist on the surreptitious failure of prison as a cultural spatial production,

And lastly, what I am laying claim to in this essay is an analytic interface between social theory, stylistic choice and political taste. I understand these realms to be inextricably bound in complex ways. An interface of this nature is not a new

tendency in aesthetic or architectural theory but the ways in which this method of analysis has be applied to prison architecture is new.

INTRODUCTION: THE SURREPTITIOUS SPECTACLE OF FAILURE

To state that prisons do not work, while a simple utterance, provokes numerous complex questions. Determining the failure of prisons must be prefaced by first asking: what actually is the nature of the prison system; then what precisely has the system been attempting to do in its two hundred year history; and who has determined or is determining those goals? To begin, using the phrase “prison system” suggests a network of roles that act together, or as it turns out in many cases, work in conflict, towards the production of prison space.³ This research project is grounded in the premise that the various fields of spatial and cultural production that culminate in the prison system have failed to reconcile into a cohesive project. Like prisons, the prison “system” does not work. This failure is reflected in the architectural design of prisons and in the production of a collection of voids that I am terming “unreconciled spaces.” Reconciled or not, these spaces are fabricated in a collection of social, political and cultural realms and produced through a complicated and convoluted institutional process of negation. I am referring to the development of the prison system with an intentionally ironic phrase, “a poetics of incarceration.” It is a making of carceral space even if the “making” of that space produces a constellation of voided spaces.

The various players that work through systems of both positive and negative dialectics resulting in the production of prison space can be divided into four distinct but related groups, each of which understands and experiences prison space through

³ Supporting the concepts of the “production of space” and the production of space through conflict, I am mostly influenced by three texts: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1974, 1984); Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, *Theodor W. Adorno*, *Walter Benjamin*, and *the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977); and Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain, Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). The last text and the concept of cultural production through negation of space was introduced to me at Cornell University, by Professor Peter Holquist, in his class, “Stalinism as Civilization,” 1997.

very different realities. The disjunction between each of these group's realities is central to the overriding thesis of this essay: that prisons do not work. Group one contains all those whose position it is to envision the reality of prison. This would include prison theorists, reformers, planners, architects and government appointed officials. The second group would be those who have instrumental contact with the material space. This would include anyone who works with or in the material space, builders, prison authorities, guards and other building professionals.⁴ The third group is anyone who lives in a prison, the inmates. The fourth and last group in this taxonomy is the audience of prison space, non-incarcerated individuals who have had no other contact with prison space other than as observers of representations of the carceral world. I am including the image of the architectural artifact of a prison building as a representation of the lived experience of carceral world. This essay focuses mostly on the first and last group outlined above but all of the groups are participants in both the fabrication and the failure of prisons that follow that fabrication. In a reflexive turn, the failure of prison space in part can be attributed to the incongruent nature of the ways in which each of these groups engages differently with both the concepts and the realities of carceral space and also the disjunctive nature in which each of these groups engage with one another.

Bewildering themes arise within the rubric of "prison as failure." The topic instigates numerous paths of inquiry that leave no apparent exit, suggesting such concerns including but not limited to the efficacy of rehabilitation, the improvement of public safety, and the question of punishment. After brief consideration of just these

⁴ There are other groups of workers to consider such as service related employees and volunteers, or those who are not directly related to prison policy or architectural planning, such as doctors, nurses, teachers and food service workers. I am excluding these groups as categories because services suggested by these types of labor were not necessarily included in the original architectural provisions of the space but were developed over the following two centuries. My research process covered the architectural implications of service related groups but inclusion in this stage of the project would require much more attention than can be allowed in this essay.

three issues, ambivalence already emerges concerning the coalescence of these very different agendas. Rehabilitation as a goal, while the most rhetorically dominant of the three, is rarely achieved in the prison system. Prisons do very little to lower the crime rate and therefore do not meet the criteria of making public space safer. And while prisons are most often successful at inflicting punishment, it is not clear how punishment as a goal serves any effective social purpose, even in the case of retributive rights for victim's families.⁵

In the voice of an architectural historian, it has been a challenge to write a traditional architectural history on prison space when immediately confronted with such disheartening concerns as stated above. Bringing this thesis on prisons into a manageable focus has been made difficult by obligations to a wide scope of social issues that have remained present throughout the research and writing process. It has been a struggle to reconcile a mounting awareness of the prison problem with a direct aesthetic architectural analysis of any prison as simply a building type. It is in some ways even ludicrous to use the term aesthetics in relation to the concept of prison.

In spite of an initial hesitancy to appear superficial by focusing on the difficult question of prison aesthetics in America, that focus is what ultimately brought closure to this unwieldy essay after repeated forays into various fields of study and topics that seemed to veer far from the initial project. Myriad topics that I have broached include the history of American domestic architecture, European and Classical architecture, fascism in Italy and the USSR, antiquity as juxtaposed to modernity in Rome and Greece, the history of prison reform movements, the history of slavery and Jim Crow laws, the history of minstrelsy, vaudeville and musical theatre, economic, social and political theory, cinema studies, philosophy, literature and tourist studies.

⁵ For a more in depth consideration of these three issues and others, see, Jessica Mitford, "101 Years of Prison Reform" in *Kind and Usual Punishment, The Prison Business* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 30-45.

In the end, the fundamental questions in this essay, while informed by these various sidetracks, ultimately look to the material artifact of one American prison, Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, founded in 1823, partially opened in 1829, and closed as an operating prison in 1971. The site sat abandoned for almost twenty years and beginning in the 1980s, preservation efforts eventually earned the site an historic designation and a prison museum was born.

In the course of its close to two-hundred year history, the prison space has gone through a multiplicity of physical changes. Figure 2 is an idealized plan and bird's-eye view of the site as it was imagined by engraver C. G. Childs between 1824-1829. The original plans of the architect, John Haviland, do not exist and many artists and architects, contemporaneous to Haviland, have created numerous contradictory representations of the site, some of which will be compared and analyzed in this essay. The first comparison is between the pastoral view in Figure 1 and the plan and birds-eye vies in Figure 2 and the plan in Figure 3. Figure 1 and Figure 2 were created close to the year the prison opened while Figure 3 is a plan of the prison twenty years after it closed in 1971. The metastasized state of the prison at the time of its closing is evidence of a consistent effort towards reform, suggesting that the prison's original plan was never adequate for its ever increasing program. In Figure 3, an artist depicts several stages of growth by using different shadings for different areas of the structure. Historians produced this image to highlight the issue of metastatic growth and to demonstrate the emblematic problem of consistent reform efforts that reflect consistent failure.

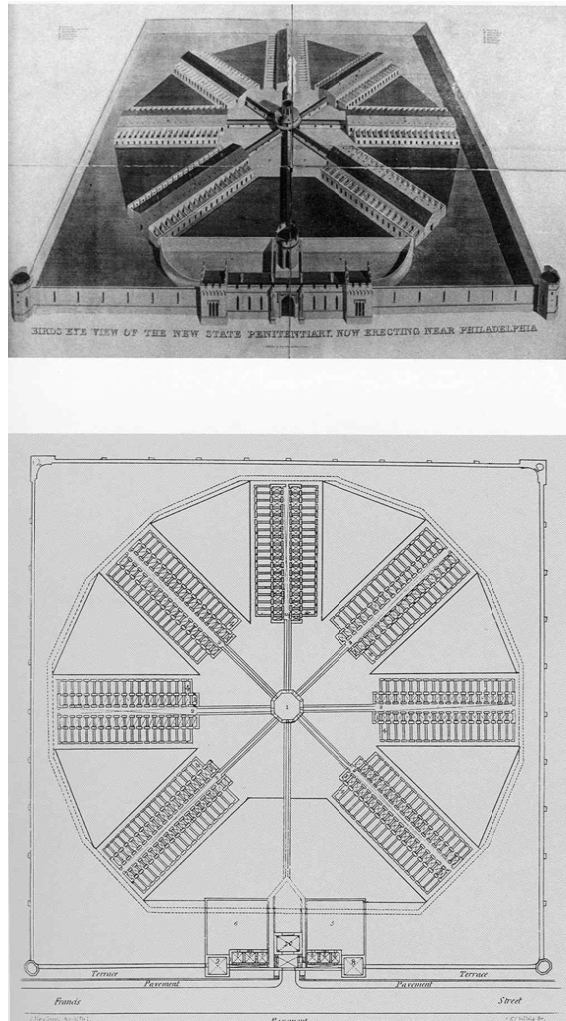


Figure 2. Cherry Hill. *C.G. Childs's Eastern State Penitentiary Bird's-eye View and Plan.*

Idealized image of Eastern State Penitentiary created in 1824 (birds-eye view) and 1829 (plan), after the work of the Architect, John Haviland.⁶

⁶ Johnston, 37.

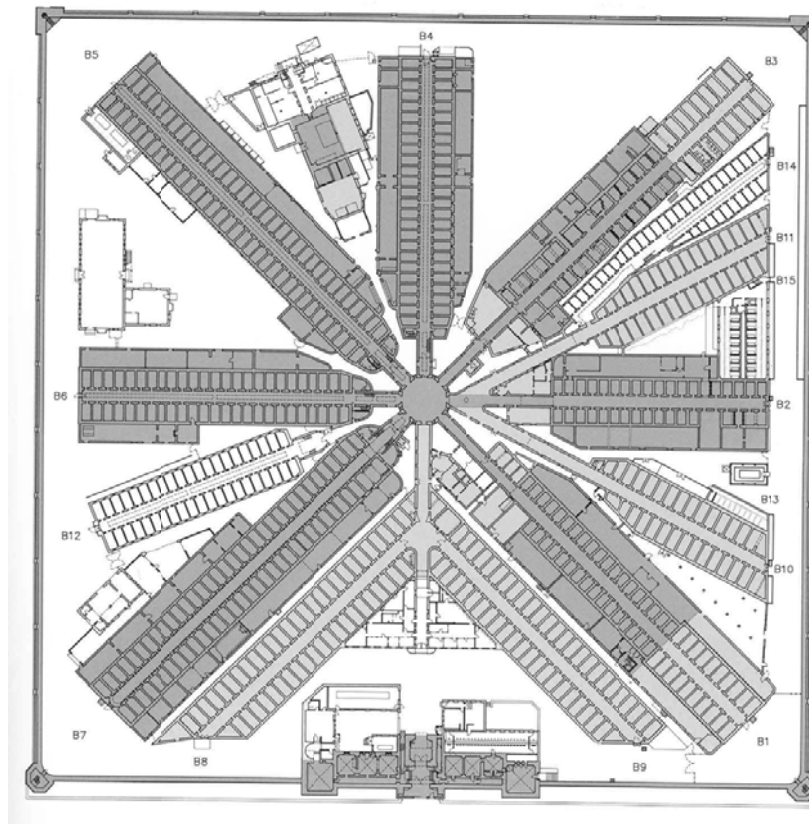


Figure 3. *Metastasized Plan of Eastern State Penitentiary.*

This plan of Eastern State Penitentiary was created in 1996, twenty years after the prison closed and shows different stages of growth that extended well beyond the original plan.⁷

I chose this particular prison because of a long history of Philadelphia's civic community's claim to primacy in the history of prison-making. Along with a self-appointed primacy in prison building is its claim of supremacy in stating that Eastern State Penitentiary has influenced prison-building world-wide. Confused by these assertions of primacy and supremacy concerning such a destructive force, in another installment of this essay, I would fully confront the motivations of those claims but with the limitations of this particular treatment, those pronouncements will remain largely undisturbed.⁸

⁷ Ibid, 87.

⁸ At the point of adding this footnote, I was editing this essay in Barcelona and visited a penitentiary that upon its opening was built on the edge of the nineteenth-century urban expansion project

Another reason I have chosen this particular architectural site is because of its present day use as a prison museum. The potential for reflection on the prison system that can be enabled by a prison museum is effectuated by Eastern State in ways that no other contemporary prison museum has been able to achieve.⁹ And lastly, because Eastern State was created in tandem with the formation of the American republic, Eastern State can be analyzed metonymically in relation to the development of America as a nation. While all of these points are worthy of deeper exploration under the rubric of prison aesthetics, I will only briefly touch on them rather than offer full expositions in the process of largely focusing on the ways in which the actual morphological manifestations of Eastern State reflect (in terms of aesthetic form) larger questions of institutional failure of the prison system.

Understanding the materiality of carceral space as reflective of theoretical problems in the prison system urges action against these problems, expanding the scope of this thesis beyond the realm of a traditional architectural historical exegesis. But there are long standing precedents for prescriptive analyses in the field of architectural history¹⁰ and while at times problematic, this method of inquiry has in no way been exhausted as an option for historical analysis. Writing of prison aesthetics in the face of omnipresent prison failure is not just an attempt to describe a poetics of incarceration by exploring the material production of prison spaces. Rather, it also

L'Eixample. It is constructed on the same radial plan as Eastern State Penitentiary and is one of the prisons that Eastern State claims to have influenced. A comparison would be valuable and is of course tempting but given time constraints, I will refrain.

⁹ Other prison museums or adapted or converted-use prison/jails visited during this project are: Cork Gaol in Cork City, Ireland; Kilmanham Gaol in Dublin, Ireland; "The Clink," in London, England; Alcatraz in San Francisco, CA; San Michele in Rome Italy; and the Jailhouse Restaurant in Owego, New York.

¹⁰ One need only to look as far as the work of Sigfried Giedion in his time honored "bible" of architectural history, *Space, Time and Architecture*. This book has been revered as the primary textbook of architectural history studies since its publication but often reads more as a prescription of how to build rather than a description of what has been accomplished in the built domain. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: the growth of a new tradition*, 5th edition (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

must point towards discovering and deciphering the intangible cultural artifacts that prisons produce within the realms of the public and private lives of American citizens. This treatment hopes to encourage movement, even in a small way, away from incarceration as an option for dealing with social transgression.

In an attempt to discover a chink in the monolithic wall of ineptitude that is the prison system, this essay will add to the impulse towards prison reform, by suggesting a more extreme change than most practicing prison reformers would ever suggest, a move towards complete abolition¹¹ of the prison system. By attacking and partially exposing a segment of the blindness contributing to the manufacture of the prison system, this essay will begin an historical examination of the multiple roles of aesthetics within the architecture of the American prison system. By examining the intentional symbolism inherent in the development of prison as an architectural type, clandestinely operating prison policies surface and can in some ways be seen as an armature for problematic American capitalist ideology and the accompanying problems of class striation. The prison system has consistently and blatantly veiled (intentional oxymoron) class striations that begin to emerge once a closer examination of the demographic of prison inhabitants is approached. Very simply, imprisonment deletes the citizenship of an underclass. A prisoner is not a citizen while incarcerated,

¹¹ Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 24-28. The term abolition as applied to the formation of the American prison system is intentionally provocative in this essay by evoking the contemporaneous movement to abolish slavery. I am not suggesting that ending prison practices alone are any kind of solution. Some institutionalized measures need to be taken to replace the system, for instance, early education, but most importantly, and in no way more easily resolved, would be the abolition of racism. Angela Davis most clearly and concisely brings together the issues of slavery, residual racism, and the development of the American prison system. "With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished 'except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.'" Davis also asks, "Are prisons racist institutions? Is racism so deeply entrenched in the institution of the prison that it is not possible to eliminate one without eliminating the other?" She posits further, "... the prison reveals congealed forms of antiblack racism that operate in clandestine ways. In other words, they are rarely recognized as racist."

and as a result, a portion of the underclass disappears from the act of political engagement.

To further expand on the oxymoron above, the apparent specific character of prisons is that prisons are hidden discrete environments, architecturally segregating prisoners from society and from each other. Because of this material morphology and what it presents as an iconographic image, prisons as architectural site and as metaphor can be intricately woven into, and support, American ideology in terms of addressing, albeit unsatisfactorily, seemingly irreconcilable class differences. This essay works to expose prisons as integrally supporting the American way of life. Prison makers produce a space that allows segmentation and exploitation of undesirables deemed illegitimate by the state. Carceral spaces are the result of a tendency to categorize a large portion of Americans as refuse. Incarceration is an undemocratic tenet of American democracy.

Prisons are but one typology in a constellation of civic and private building types¹² each with separate but interconnected agendas (see Girard College in Figure 4). Prisons (as a specific building type) do not work, as I state in the first utterance of this essay. But this is not to say that prisons do not work *towards* performing ideological functions. It is also not to say that in some respect prisons were and are a success. This essay questions deeply the value of those functions. Whether or not a free citizen is directly affected by incarceration, for most Americans, prisons appear to work towards maintaining public order under layered veneers of democracy, liberty and freedom.

¹² “There are various public institutions. Among them a most excellent Hospital — a Quaker establishment, but not sectarian in the great benefits it confers; a quiet, quaint old Library, named after Franklin; a handsome Exchange and Post Office; and so forth.” Charles Dickens in his description of Eastern State Penitentiary. Dickens, 245.



Figure 4. *Girard College and Eastern State Penitentiary.*

This image is from the back of Girard College with a distant view of Eastern State (diagonally to the upper right) from its side and back corner. This building at Girard was constructed with the intention of giving visitors access to the roof as can be seen in the small figures standing there. This is exhibited in the high cost of the roof construction with the intention of providing support to the weight of visitor's bodies. This was common practice in nineteenth century building. From this privileged vantage point the volume of Haviland's interior building can almost be seen, but not quite.¹³

In an effort to expose the hermeneutics of American prison making and the relationship of this process to American nation making, this essay focuses on a architectural site that many people mistakenly believe to be America's first prison, Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary.¹⁴ In operation for almost 150 years, this prison strategically created a specific type of carceral environment, the penitentiary. Considering the term penitentiary, in a generous reading of the purpose of a building type named as such, one could state that its primary goal would be that of moral rehabilitation. In this particular prison space, rehabilitation in the form of controlled penitence was sought through the practice of solitary confinement, another unsettling

¹³ W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002) 2.

¹⁴ The "mistake" is a semantic one. Eastern State Penitentiary can rightfully claim to be the first American "penitentiary" but there were certainly prisons in existence previous to this site. Eastern State defined the subgenre of penitentiary to that of prison.

claim to primacy of Eastern State Penitentiary and also part of the guiding force of the architectural design of this penitentiary. Although classified as an architectural building type designed to fulfill a theoretically intrinsic programme, this prison has never (nor has any other prison in America or abroad) succeeded in fulfilling a dominant rhetorical purpose, that of rehabilitation. Charles Dickens stated very clearly a problem in this respect by writing, “in the outskirts, stands a great prison, called the Eastern Penitentiary: conducted on a plan peculiar to the state of Pennsylvania. The system here, is rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement. I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong.”¹⁵ The despairing failure of prisons marks individual bodies and is demonstrated in Charles Dickens’s use of an engraving (Figure 5) by artist, Marcus Stone. “The Solitary Prisoner” is taken from Dickens book, *Pictures from Italy and American Notes for General Circulation*, a text that in part was highly critical of Eastern State Penitentiary and particularly critical of the practice of solitary confinement.

Charles Dickens was one of the most prominent foreign critics¹⁶ of Eastern State Penitentiary, the architectural object of study for this essay. I chose to present

¹⁵ Dickens, 241.

¹⁶ Other contemporaneous analyses of the nascent penitentiary space, by authors both foreign and American are the following: Gustave de Beaumont et Alexis de Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire aux Etats-Unis et de son application en France* (Paris: H. Fournier Jeune, 1833); George Combe (1788-1858), *Notes on the United States of North America: During a Phrenological Visit in 1838-9-40*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841); William Crawford (1788-1847), *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States (1835)* (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969 [introduction by N. Johnston]); F. A. Demetz (1796-1873) & G.-A. Blouet, *Rapport sur les pénitentiars des Etats-Unis*, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1837. Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (New York: The Modern Library, 1996 [Introduction by C. Hitchens]); Guillaume M. A. Ferrus, *Des prisonniers, de l'emprisonnement et des prisons* (Paris: Gémier-Baillière Librairie éditeur, 1850); N. H. Julius (1783-1862), *Leçons sur les prisons* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1831); F. A. F. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Des prisons de Philadelphie; par un européen* (Paris: Mme Huzard, 1819 (4e édition)); Caleb Lowmes, *An Account of the Alteration and Present State of the Penal Laws of Pennsylvania, Containing, also, an Account of the Goal and Penitentiary House of Philadelphia –and the Interior Management Thereof*, Boston, Young & Minns (Lexington: Bradford, 1794, 1799); Caleb Lowmes, *An Enquiry How Far the Punishment of Death is Necessary in Pennsylvania. With Notes and Illustrations by William Bradford, Esq.* (Philadelphia: Dobson, 1793); Charles J. M. Lucas (1803-1889), *Exposé de l'état de la question pénitentiaire en Europe et aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Imprimerie Panckoucke, 1844); Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), *Society in America*, 2 vol. (London & New York: Saunders & Otley, 1837; L.-M. Moreau-Christophe (1800-1881)), *De la réforme*

this image as complement to that of the actual penitentiary because of my primary interest in the relationship of the body to that of architectural space. My own identity as an historian emerges from performance studies focusing particularly on the moving body. Integrating and transitioning into the History of Architecture and Urban Development, I searched for a site of study within architectural history that would interface the fields of dance and architecture. In this effort, I was interested in locating a site that was inextricably bound to the body, or to be obvious, the reverse, a site where the body was inextricably bound to architecture. I take from Dickens and offer this image of a prisoner from Eastern State that represents a somatic architectural experience that will help support a critical tone of how individual bodies are affected in the process of prison making, deeply informed by my own somatic experience visiting prison spaces. Keeping in mind that it is the absent presence of bodies that renders a haunting tone to an empty prison space, I will turn to the architectural specificity of the building type by beginning with its most visually prominent feature, the morphology that creates the most prominent void, the prison wall (Figure 6). I will begin by deciphering the symbolism of the wall before turning to a traditional architectural analysis of the morphology. Understanding the wall as a symbol is essential to understanding the aesthetic choices that bring it into material reality.

des prisons, d'après le système de l'emprisonnement individuel (Paris: Huzard, 1836); Robert J. Turnbull (1775-1833), *A Visit to the Philadelphia Prison* (Philadelphia: Bud & Bartram, 1796); George W. Smith (1800-1876), *A Defence of the System of Solitary Confinement of Prisoners Adopted by the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: E. G. Dorsey, 1833); and Richard Vaux, *Brief Sketch of the Origin and History of the Sate Penitentiary for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: McLaughlin Brothers, 1872).



Figure 5. *The Solitary Prisoner*.
Marcus Stone, artist (1840-1921), *The Solitary Prisoner*, Engraving from Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy and American Notes for General Circulation* (Boston: James Osgood and Co., 1875).¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid, 241.



Figure 6. *Eastern State Penitentiary Wall.*

This photo was taken in April of 2009, as I was finishing this project. Rather than an institutional image that positions the camera lens parallel to the flat surface of the wall and maintains codes of Cartesian perspectivalism, this is an interpretative image emphasizing this wall as a problematic morphology. This is the eastern portion of the south facing, front façade of Eastern State Penitentiary on Fairmount Avenue, stretching between Twenty-first and Twenty-second Streets in Philadelphia.¹⁸

In the effort to expose the contradictions of this space from an architectural perspective, topics to be explored in this essay include the site's employment of architectural style and its intended effect, the material structure of the building(s) and its relationship to both programme and aesthetic symbolism, policy development and the ways in which policy resulted in architectural morphologies, political motives for building this and other prisons and the ways in which politics affected architectural morphologies, the intended and actual symbolism of the site as an architectural device, the prison as an architectural tool of social control, and its position as a persistently failing institution. But it is with the wall that many of these issues can be projected.

¹⁸ Theodora Marcantonis, Administrative Staff at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, 2027 Fairmount Avenue, Philadelphia PA. Photo taken Tuesday April 21, 2009.

CHAPTER 1: THE PRISON WALL: A TOOL OF SEGREGATION

The American prison system is a slippery phenomenon when considering the endless paradoxes that arise when comparing its perceived purpose to its quotidian functioning. Actual practices within the walls of a prison are intentionally obscured from public view, both through policies of concealment and by the calculated nature of its architectural design. For instance (again continuing the intentional oxymoron of blatantly veiled nature of prison space), the wall of a prison is offered as a paradox: what I termed “a surreptitious spectacle.” It is an obvious and unavoidable visual spectacle but it hides from public view its interior structure, its inhabitants, and their daily practices. Although it obscures all activities, the wall behaves as a blank slate that works on an audience’s curiosity and imagination. As theorized by Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), the general public imagines worse punishments occurring behind the wall than could ever be witnessed in any public site of punishment or torture. But at the same time this concealment allows the public to forget in some ways that anything at all is going on behind those walls.¹⁹ Because of the intrinsic nature of the morphology of the wall, it both conceals and in a certain sense, reveals the possibility of practices that lie behind it. Looking into the history of the American prison as an individual building type, Benjamin Rush, American founding father, theorized the creation of a prison wall that could be read like a book. For Rush the wall was necessary to provoke the public’s (literary) imagination into dramatizing a horror occurring on the other side of the wall, a horror unavailable to a hardened citizenry beyond what the public had become accustomed to witnessing in the public torture of

¹⁹ This topic will be more fully referenced in this essay but comes in a large part from the following text, Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment, Protest, Politics And the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

actual bodies.²⁰ The intention towards provocation of the literary imagination was inspired by and resulted in the propagation of numerous literary representations of prison space.²¹

Apart from speculating as to the activities behind a prison wall, for a general audience of non-incarcerated citizens, life in prison has been imagined into existence as it has been performed, sensationalized and romanticized through various media and narrative representations. Media representations act together with the wall of a prison. The wall performs as a literally and metaphorically opaque surface upon which the social and cultural signification and the political agenda of the governmental institution of the prison system can be mapped. Media of all types, in the form of entertainment, satisfies a public's insatiable interest in the narratives of the transgressions that place people behind those walls as well as the narratives of their activities once incarcerated.²² In contrast to a plethora of media representations, prison policy intentionally hides the actual everyday practices of the prison system from public view and public consciousness. Through a Machiavellian labyrinth of political and cultural maneuvers in concert with the "free hand" of media representation, while

²⁰ Benjamin Rush, "AN ENQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS OF PUYBLIC [sic]PUNISHMENTS UPON CRIMINALS AND UPON SOCIETY, READ IN THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING POLITICAL ENQUIREIES, CONVENED AT THE HOUSE OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ESQ, IN PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 9TH 1787. " in *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical*, edited, and with an introductory essay by Michael Meranze (Schenectady, New York: Union College Press, 1988). This is also how Michel Foucault begins his often-quoted text, *Discipline and Punish*. To contrast the new form of carceral punishment, Foucault begins with a scene of public torture. This is what Rush is referring to in his presentation (cited above) delivered at the home of Benjamin Franklin in 1787. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage, Random House, 1978).

²¹ Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century was preoccupied with themes of captivity, kidnapping, prison and descriptions of metaphorical carceral spaces. Pertaining to the research done for this essay see: George Lippard, *The Quaker City, or, The monks of Monk-Hall : a romance of Philadelphia life, mystery, and crime* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1845).

²² *Oz*, created by Tom Fontana, HBO 1997-2003. The HBO television series *Oz* is what first inspired my interest in prison studies. While quite engaging, I was disturbed that the dramatization of such an unsettling institution was so entertaining. I wanted to explore the process of how these types of stories were made and also consider why they were made. Ultimately I looked to what seemed to be a site of origin, Eastern State Penitentiary.

actual prison practices remain hidden, the prison as an ideological concept remains safely yet paradoxically and pervasively buried in public consciousness.

While this paradoxical blind awareness of the idea of the prison system, as it is achieved through several media conduits, can be extensively explored,²³ this essay will demonstrate that the architectural type of any modern prison, but particularly Eastern State Penitentiary, is designed to be presented to the public and to be read similarly as any book, film or other representation of prison space. A prison building, or more specifically, its wall, as it is presented to the public, is intended to produce an effect and can be considered a category of media representation. But in all senses, representations are not actuality. Concerning the wall, the equation of the real subtracted from what is perceived as real, offers a false assurance in the prison system that sequesters the reality of prison life into oblivion while rendering the concept of incarceration omnipresent in the lives of American citizens.

In a massive web of confused and confusing representations resides an actual architectural building type, with a remarkably complex architectural history, a history that both reflects and reveals as much about the prison system as it does about western ideology as a whole. And further, the method that brings architecture to material reality, the rules, theories, models and plans combined with the history of the architectural type of prison, produce yet another discursive plane that performs contradictory functions and reflects the failures of the institution of prison building as it grates against prison policy as both building and policy grate against prison practices. In a later section of this essay, I will begin a detailed analysis of the architecture of Eastern State by first unpacking the design principles of its gothic inspired wall. But before exploring the wall's architectural style and its intended

²³ I explored this phenomenon in a course I developed titled, Prisons, Performance and Domicity, taught at Cornell University in 2006.

effect, it is necessary to analyze the motivations for building in this style by asking several questions and offering a trajectory of justifications for building this penitentiary. Essential to this inquiry is to expose problems of making prisons as a visionary gesture. This requires an exploration of some of the social theories, political motives and architectural design choices of the first group of individuals who participate in creating a prison reality, group one of the four groups listed above, prison theorists, reformers, planners, architects and government appointed officials.²⁴ By envisioning the prison system as an architectural device of social control, the resulting paradoxes take shape and together form the unreconciled spaces that constitute the space of the actual building type. Envisioning Eastern State began long before an architect became involved in the process. The need for prisons, and in turn, the building of prisons was built into American ideology along with the formation of the American Republic. The next few paragraphs will work backwards chronologically to unpeel the layers that form the present day prison archetype.

Although classified as an architectural building type, prisons in America have never succeeded in coming to terms with the conflicting agendas of punishment versus rehabilitation. Most often the goal of punishment is achieved over any semblance of rehabilitation in prison functioning. Is this conflict represented in the architecture of a prison? Are the terms punishment and rehabilitation indeed antinomic concepts? Do the two function at cross-purposes? Or is one a means to an end for the other? Would

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, reflection on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London, New York: Verso Publishers, 1990).

John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City, Pasolini's Rome* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). My use of the concept of "imagined communities" is mostly influenced by the work of Benedict Anderson in his text, *Imagined Communities* and the work of John David Rhodes in his text, *Stupendous, Miserable City, Pasolini's Rome*. My ultimate interest in the concept of "imagined communities" resides not in the political entities that are formed and produce actual spaces of influence. I am looking more at the ways in which socially problematic groups of people are conflated into a criminal element and their futures are theorized and categorized and imaginatively solved by placing them into the context of theoretical architectural solutions such as prisons and modernist housing projects, the latter not being covered in this essay but certainly parallel and interfacing with the carceral community in profoundly disturbing ways.

it be helpful to place the concepts of rehabilitation and punishment into historical contexts? While punishment in prisons serves to satisfy a portion of the public's taste for retribution, the prison system's purpose of punishment, concomitant to that of rehabilitation, has never been clearly defined as a positive force in society.²⁵ The ambivalence of rehabilitation in relation to punishment has never produced a solid agenda that has resulted in firm affirmation of the primary purpose of any carceral institution.²⁶

The conundrum of the need for a prison system, against evidence of its persistent failure, is kept in motion by the general public's perception that prisons are the only solution to criminal transgression. To summarize several concepts that I have thus far put forward in the essay, the singularity of the awkward solution of prison is made palatable by the "surreptitious spectacle of failure" of the architectural type, specifically the morphology of the wall, to be discussed in more detail as this essay unfolds. The financially successful use of prison as fodder for sensational narratives in literature (and today in film and television) combined with the pervasive use of prison as both allegory and metaphor in the realms of straightforward entertainment as well as documentaries, also forward the prison agenda. Veiled behind the misinformed but convenient rhetoric of prisons being the protector of social order and the site of criminal retribution is the false assurance that the goals of prison aim for rehabilitation.

The perplexing scale of the growth of carceral environments over the past two hundred years has been supported by an historically intentional self-interested strategy of an urban elite to continuously develop definitions of what is criminal apart from what is not and what and how those transgressions should be punished. Expanding

²⁵ Mitford, 30-45.

²⁶ Ibid.

definitions of criminality have relentlessly emerged from Enlightenment concepts of freedom and liberty. Issues of defining criminality were the impetus of the *Bill of Rights* and were spurred by a belief that human rights are not self evident. The perpetual process of amendments to the Constitution, while defining rights and freedoms, acknowledges a tension around those freedoms and recognizes the potential for the government or for its citizens to transgress those rights and freedoms. While many of the Constitutional articles and amendments addressing criminality are directed towards the potential of government abuse of individual rights, more than half of the first ten amendments refer to the process of trials and prosecution of citizens. The first article in the fourteenth amendment, titled “Citizenship Rights,” states the way in which citizenship rights can be taken away, by “due process in law.” Prisons are the site where the practice of the removal of rights is spatialized. Prisons are spaces that perform as an opposite to the much-valued space of freedom, perceived as limitless within American ideology.²⁷

The first step in a poetics of incarceration is to imagine it into existence. Following that first step are further discussions and imaginings, the writing or drawing of the design of the space, and the many ways in which the space can be represented to a public.²⁸ On a parallel plane, once the material space of a prison is realized, are the actual practices within any one prison? The level of activity of prison practices is another form of making or actualizing prison space. All together these actions begin to form a poetics of incarceration and the actions as a process are an aesthetic process. To reiterate, ubiquitous representations of prison space and prison practices in film and literature are aesthetic efforts and are parallel to, but not the same as, actual prison

²⁷ For a more nuanced exposition on this topic see McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*.

²⁸ C. Fred Alford, “Would it Matter if Everything Foucault Said about Prison Were Wrong? ‘Discipline and Punish’ after Twenty Years” in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (February 2000), 125-146. This article is in part a concise text that analyzes the effect of the concept of prison policy on daily life of the non-incarcerated as put forth by Michel Foucault in his well known work, *Discipline and Punish*.

practices. But the reality of producing prison space, whether in material reality or in the imagination, does not make it a successful production of space in terms of societal benefit. Further, the pervasive metaphorical uses of incarceration (for example, the commonly used phrases “my job/life/marriage is a prison”), also support a blind acceptance of the existence of prisons in the face of unyielding malfunction. But again, pervasive entry of the idea of prison into public consciousness does not make prison space a socially beneficial space either.

Architecture, like literature, performance and cinema is an aesthetic production. Architecture as a poetic practice takes the material representational and actual form of prison making, particularly in the morphology of the wall, aligning it with other agents of the representation of prison-making mediated through a variety of other art forms. Through a variety of aesthetic buffers, the dysfunctional reality of prison culture slips in and out of public consciousness and remains unreconciled in its very real failures. The romanticized concept of incarceration extracted by an entertained audience does not reconcile the negative reality of prison space by creating a positive benefit for society. In fact, romanticizing prison space through entertainment is in part what allows the horrors of prison to persist. Following the trajectory of a prison poetics, before moving on to an analysis of the material space of a prison, exploring the imagining of the space must take place and that includes the creation of policy that will guide the production of the lived carceral space.

CHAPTER 2: POLICY VERSUS PRACTICE VIA SPATIAL PRODUCTION: A POETICS OF CARCERAL SPACE

Pain, punishment, retribution, rehabilitation, classification, parole and probation are some terms, concepts and processes that have historically formed the policies that have supported systems of incarceration. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, in tandem with decisions concerning penal policy, prisons became materially instantiated as an individual architectural building type. In the United States, choices in American prison design grew from eighteenth-century American political thought defining concepts of freedom and liberty for a new nation, as well as threats to those same tenets of freedom and liberty. In the political process of defining freedom, crime (and ways of addressing the problem of crime) would also come to be defined. Efforts towards building new types of prisons became marked as a very American process. Following this tendency, prisons and, more particularly, penitentiaries that could in any way be classified as specifically American were paralleled by similar nationalistic/prison building efforts abroad.²⁹ Differing methods, systems and prison architectural types within America (most notably, the Pennsylvania and the Auburn Systems) competed to be defined as supreme while at the same time reflecting the dominance of their respective individual American urban spaces (Philadelphia and New York City).³⁰

²⁹ Robin Evans, *Fabrication of Virtue, English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, *Oxford History of Prisons, The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁰ The two primary competing systems in America were the Pennsylvania System and the Auburn System, also called the solitary system and the silent system, respectively. The two systems were very similar. The solitary system intended to hold prisoners in complete isolation. The individual prisoner slept, ate, worked and exercised alone, the goal being a completely solitary and silent life. A prisoner held in the silent system slept in an individual cell but worked, ate and exercised among other prisoners, with the intention of halting all communication in spite of bodily proximity. Neither of these systems worked very differently from one another nor did either system meet their intended goals. For more information on these two systems and for primary resources that in retrospect reveal the futility of this competition, see the papers on Roberts Vaux, a member of the Board of Commissioners of Eastern State

In the context of the new American Republic, the birth of the prison as a specific building type can be determined to be a modern phenomenon, although some morphologies (for instance, the wall, the grate, the cell), defining prison as a formal architectural category, can be traced to carceral environments as far back as antiquity.³¹ Depending on the source,³² the birth of the prison type known as the penitentiary, and as it is understood in the twenty-first century, can be dated from

Penitentiary, held at the Pennsylvania Historic Society in Philadelphia. Vaux's papers reveal the competition to be less engaged with proving which system was actually most effective, but rather the debate was more engaged with establishing the primary American urban space as either New York City or Philadelphia. The Erie Canal was completed just after the opening of New York's Auburn prison and just prior to the opening of Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary. The Erie Canal gave New York financial primacy over Philadelphia. In the second and third decades of the nineteenth-century, the two prisons types became symbols of the battle over urban status between New York and Philadelphia. Prison primacy was one of the most hotly debated subjects between the two urban centers, yet in the end proving very little direct influence on the urban status of either city. The exponential growth of the prison population in either city was a reflection of the rapid growth of both cities and each city's respective solution to the "immigration problems" that arose in the rapid growth of urban spaces.

³¹ Looking to representations of antiquity as related to concepts of provocative imagination as described above, Piranesi emerges as an important influence. For more on the connection of prison building to antiquity see: Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Carceri d'Invenzione*, four editions issued from, 1761-1778, printed in *The Dark Prisons*, an Edition from the Collection of the Arthur Ross Foundation, exhibited in 1988 at The Italian Cultural Institute, New York, and in 1989 at the Arthur Ross Gallery/Kamin Gallery (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, published by Smith-Edwards-Dunlap Company, 1988); and Marguerite Yourcenar, "The Dark Brain of Piranesi," in *Black Brain of Piranesi and other essays* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux 1984).

³² For various accounts of the history of prisons see: Harry Elmer Barnes, Ph. D., *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania, a Study in American Social History* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1968). E. J. Burford, *a short history of the Clink Prison* (London, UK: 1 Clink Street, 1989); Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, Harper Collins Publishers, 1993); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 1978); David J. Garland, *Culture of Control, Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Alfred Hopkins, *Prisons and Prison Building* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballow Press Inc., 1930); Norman Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary, Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1994); Meranze, Michael, *Laboratories of Virtue, Punishment, Revolution and Authority in Philadelphia 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Rebecca Mary McLennan, *Citizens and Criminals: the Rise of the Carceral State, 1890-1935*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1999; Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishment, The Prison Business* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1973); Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, *Oxford History of Prisons, The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Peter Okun, *Crime and the Nation, Prison Reform and Popular Fiction in Philadelphia, 1786-1800* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002); David J., Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience, The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980); David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1971, 2002); Negley K. Teeters, and John D. Shearer, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill, The Separate System of Penal Discipline: 1829-1913*, Philadelphia: Temple University Publications and New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

anywhere between 1750 and 1830. By many accounts it can be located precisely in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.³³

In various ways, American prison building has influenced, is influenced by, or is at least parallel to reform in European prison building. Determining what is meant by a distinctively American prison system is unavoidably tied to the larger question of defining what is meant by a distinctive system of American nation building. While similar arguments have been made concerning the birth of prisons in England and France,³⁴ American nation building and American prison building were enabled by, and required an attachment to, capitalist production as expressly defined by America's contribution as a new nation in the global economy. Apart from prison *birth*, prison *growth* was also entwined in the history of economic development in the United States.

Before turning to an architectural analysis of the wall, it is important to further consider one of the most dominant functions of the wall, to segregate. Penology is a system of segregation. The founding fathers, *white men* and property owners who considered themselves a morally, financially and politically elite group, inscribed a framework for penology into the Constitution of the United States.³⁵ The Constitution did not address specific crimes or specific forms of punishment. But looking to the records of Eastern State Penitentiary in the first years of its operation details specific crimes that received prosecutorial attention and the resulting punishments. Actions considered criminal by the governing entity of newly independent Philadelphia represented by America's founding fathers, can be determined by the list of offences in prison records. The varying length of sentences that were delivered reflected the

³³ One of the goals of this essay was to bring assertions concerning the primacy of Eastern State Penitentiary into question but due to space and time limitations, the scope of this project has been diminished and that agenda deferred.

³⁴ Evans, *Fabrication of Virtue*.

³⁵ See *U.S. Constitution Online* at : <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html> (accessed April 16, 2009).

differences in perception of the severity of each of the crimes. Most of the offences were concerned with taking possession of someone else's property. The length of sentences for theft was up to fourteen years, greatly exceeding sentences for murder, usually two years demonstrating that in this capitalist structure, property was more valued than life. This discrepancy deems theft a more serious crime than murder.³⁶ These differences reveal more when considering the identities of the prisoners extracted from the ways in which their identities were described (photography as a tool of physical identification was unavailable at the time of the opening of Eastern State Penitentiary). The predominant description of prisoner identity in terms of profession and complexion is *non-white* (my term) *farmer*. I am using non-white with the understanding that the term would have had different connotations in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia. *White* was a category at that time but the range of non-white categories was much more expansive and more vague than it is today. White in antebellum America does not directly correspond to twenty-first-century understandings of racial identity.³⁷ I am using non-white as it can be understood as being diametrically opposed to the identities of the ruling class, an Anglo elite of property owners such as Benjamin Rush.³⁸ The term "farmer" does appear in the records³⁹ but I am reading this term not simply to refer to agrarian laborers. Having committed crimes in Philadelphia, these people were clearly engaged with the urban fabric. I am reading the term to encompass all poor people, living geographically or

³⁶ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, Loc 2-4070, vol 3. This assertion does not take into account possibilities of white privilege within the lower strata and appears to erase African-American or Native American specificity. But the primary sources that I have considered in this project do not delineate this specificity. Further research in this area would be valuable.

³⁷ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

³⁸ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, Loc 2-4070, vol 3. The intake records show the highest predominance of profession to be that of farmer. The highest predominance of skin color, or "complexion" as it was referred to, was non-white (the term "white" does not appear): black, swarthy, dark, brown, ruddy, bright mulatto, light mulatto, dark mulatto, florid, mulatto or half Indian, fresh, sandy, light.

³⁹ Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, Loc 2-4070, vol 3. The intake records show the highest predominance of profession to be that of farmer.

metaphorically outside the central urban environment of the urban moneyed elite. These “criminals” who were convicted were new to the city, or were making an unwelcome and illegitimate entrance into the urban economic fabric; in a sense, immigrants or foreigners to the Anglo elite of property owners. There are cases of middle and upper class moneyed citizens being incarcerated, but certainly not in the first years of this prison, and when a middle class citizen was incarcerated, this action cast a grand shadow on their class identity.⁴⁰ In any case, upon entering this prison as an inmate, one loses his status as a citizen by losing his civil rights.

Legitimated by the State since the birth of America, the American prison system has consistently suppressed the ambitions of the economically disenfranchised while enabling the already upwardly mobile interests of the upper and middle classes to flourish. While penal laws are said to punish social transgressions, prisons were built to segregate social transgressors and as a site of punishment for the crime of being unable to compete in the established capitalist urban economy, both monetarily and morally. Financial and moral standards were being redefined and established in America and have continued to be reexamined to the present day, redefining what is a criminal act in the process.⁴¹ Contrary to rhetoric surrounding the theories of prison reform, prisons have never served to rehabilitate the inhabitants of carceral

⁴⁰ I am determining this aspersion based on literature contemporaneous to the early years of operation of Eastern State such as : George Lippard, *The Quaker City, or, The monks of Monk-Hall : a romance of Philadelphia life, mystery, and crime* (Philadelphia : T.B. Peterson, 1845).

⁴¹ Charles George, *Life under the Jim Crow laws* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000).

Two of the most obvious examples of how shifting laws define and redefine crime were: in the nineteenth century, the Jim Crow laws; and in the twentieth century, anti-drug legislation. Both of these categories of laws have most prominently affected people of color as well as those perceived as immigrants, to the detriment of both of these related demographics. For example, the occurrence of rape seemed to increase after the Civil War but what increased was the accusation and prosecution of the crime, not necessarily the crime itself. More recently are the drug laws created during the Reagan administration that put an incredible burden on the American carceral system. During the present economic crisis (2010), prisons are being hit hard and sentences are being reduced on a large scale as a response to the economy. In neither case is the occurrence of crime changing as much as is the criminalization or decriminalization of particular behaviors are changing. Randall C. Archibald, California, in Financial Crisis, Opens Prison Doors, New York Times, March 24, 2010, p. A14.

environments, nor have prisons been successful at sheltering society from criminal behaviors,⁴² in spite of “legitimizing fictions of the American social order.”⁴³ Prisons perform one primary goal: to inflict punishment on those the state determines to be transgressors of state or federal law, those who break the rules created to protect the American way of life. “Historically, it has been at once a highly visible apparatus of state coercion, a concentrated mass of human energies and desires, an official symbol of justice, security, and the state’s presumed right over life and death, and the outstanding example of an unfree institution in a putatively free society.”⁴⁴

Often modern media representations have attempted to support the agenda of rehabilitation without conscious acknowledgement of the tendency towards punishment. Though for most of the un-incarcerated public, prisons perform or signify as futilely repressive institutions that cruelly and expensively delimit freedom while abusing a targeted group of social transgressors, but seemingly paradoxically necessary all the same. But still, forever floating near the surface of this perception, and allowing the futility to persist unresolved, even for the most secular of citizens, are unsubstantiated myths of rehabilitation of transgressors, myths of a stronger sense of public safety in the face of transgression, and a tacit sense of divine retribution punishing transgressors.⁴⁵ Contradictorily understood and accepted as costly failures, prisons persist as the primary solution for socially transgressive behavior by working to extricate from society those who are perceived as transgressors and clouding or veiling their very existence from public space.⁴⁶ While perennially recognized as unsuccessful and futile, in the face of irresolvable questions of ineffectuality, attempts

⁴² Mitford, 30-45.

⁴³ McLennan, 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁴⁵ Mitford, 30-45.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Reform efforts have introduced related institutions or procedures such as drug courts and probation but ultimately when these fail, as they often do considering recidivism rates, prison is the result.

at prison reform have cyclically resurfaced and are often complexly bound to the issue of corruption. The notion that prisons are corrupt is counterbalanced by the hopeful myth that under proper supervision, prisons will in some ways succeed.

The prison issue is too large and its practices too hidden for most people to address effectively on a personal level, and therefore prisons remain an unapproachable monolith believed to be doing some good for someone, somehow, somewhere. Poor people who were new to the urban fabric lacked a system of financial support or tools of education to enter the world of the financially solvent. People living in poverty could not fully participate in a competitive market and/or social economy. Ironically, housing these people in prison costs more than supporting any system of education to thwart potential criminality. In the process, for lack of a more comprehensive system of insuring equal opportunity, freedom as an inalienable right becomes a privilege rather than a right as it is rendered alienable to this segregated group of transgressors.

The prison system targeted the poor although full philosophical or spiritual consideration would include all of society. In spite of that target, the prison system fails to offer any actual aid to its audience. Who benefits from this costly system? What demographic understands the malfunctions of this system to successfully aid a particular way of life? What is the return on this vast expenditure? While a costly delimited freedom is a truism for the people who live in prisons, warehousing the poor, in many ways, supports fluent production of American culture for its free citizens. Incarceration perpetually defines freedom for some while helping to define portions of society as criminal. The prison system is a machine that establishes freedom as a privilege rather than as a right and to do this, the prison system must operate or perform in complexly surreptitious ways while remaining forever in the public mind's eye. Although apparent, it is necessary to keep the public blind (or have

it choose to remain so) to the full implications of failure within the system. Prison is a monolith of ineptitude residing behind a high wall of obfuscation. This is how the system was theorized into being by America's founding fathers,⁴⁷ as an intentionally clouded and veiled institution. Benjamin Rush had studied the writings of British prison reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and Italian penal reformer Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794). Rebecca McLennan observes, "Modifying Beccarian ideas concerning the disciplinary effects of terror, [Benjamin] Rush also theorized that the complete seclusion of convicts from free citizens would deter the latter from crime; Uncertain of what, exactly, went on behind penitential walls, citizens would be left to imagine the 'horrors' of imprisonment, and, in time, their children would 'press upon the evening fire in listening to tales that will be spread from this abode of misery.'" ⁴⁸

Penology of the type analyzed in this essay is not specific to America nor is it specific to democracy. But what is distinctive about penology in American society is the way in which the concept of prison is discursively and symbolically disseminated throughout American culture and, in turn, defines American democracy. Free America gains its understanding of prison through aesthetic mediation, either through the medium of entertainment or by way of actual architectural representations. American democracy is defined in the process and renders acquisition of this understanding as partially an aesthetic process. Liberty and freedom are essential concepts characterizing the American democratic citizen. Prison is a material apparatus that denies liberty and freedom. By both participating in and transgressing the ever-changing rules of society, people without access to capital both support and threaten the order and ideological machinery of the privileged classes. Imprisoned for participating in illegitimate economies, both financial and moral, prisoners supply an

⁴⁷ Benjamin Rush, "AN ENQUIRY..."

⁴⁸ McLennan, 37.

opposite identity to that of citizen. Prisons perform for the general public through surreptitious mediated spatial representations. It is surreptitious in that actual prisons activities remain hidden but is a spectacle in that prison spaces are mediated through representations or aesthetic processes such as writing, cinema and architectural design.

There are other institutions that have supported segregation of society in surreptitious ways. Slavery combined with its residual racism is one of the most recognizable segregationist spatialities in America's history. In the realm of entertainment, the trajectory of minstrel shows (begun contemporaneously to the abolition of the American system of slavery and suspiciously at the same time of the founding of a new carceral system in America) created an institution that was a conduit for the continuation of segregationists' sensibilities.⁴⁹ The lasting effects of slavery should be apparent to anyone capable of reading this essay. The prison system replaced slavery as an institutional method of dealing with the issue of racial segregation.⁵⁰ Many other spaces segregate society by racial, gender, sexual or national but I am most concerned with more subtle and seemingly less threatening tools of oppression such as architectural ornamentation that in part perform similar ideological work as that of art and entertainment.

Prisons have been central to the development of America and capitalism. As a material artifact, prisons operate poetically (they are made and they make) and practically (they perform) and are aesthetic (they are visual and emotive) in their ideological role. I will ask questions that can be applied to the general prison system, but will work specifically with Eastern State Penitentiary: How was Eastern State

⁴⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft, Blackface Minstrelsy and the American working class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) Coterminous refers to the period of time of changing policies and practices of prison reform, development of minstrelsy and the abolition of slavery, none of which can be pinpointed to a particular year but rather were complex processes spanning several decades but were all engaged with racist ideology.

⁵⁰ McLennan, 45-62.

Penitentiary created through policy and how was it then formalized into practice and to what intended effect? How did the architecture of Eastern State Penitentiary function with the goal of punishment and/or rehabilitation? How was the architecture of Eastern State Penitentiary supposed to operate as a cultural symbol for those who were not (yet) incarcerated? How did the architecture of Eastern State Penitentiary support a hierarchical social system both inside and outside of the carceral space? And finally, can the prison system be abolished?

I will now turn to the material architectural artifact of Eastern State Penitentiary and address design choices, including stylistic choices and possible stylistic historical influences; and explore how these choices reflect architectural revival movements and the ways in which style plays a part in the “performance” of Eastern State Penitentiary. More generally I will look at ways the concept of architectural revival relates to issues of penal reform. I will also look at the ways in which interested parties influenced stylistic choices outside the intrinsic design interests of the architect. I will then look to the social and cultural symbolism of the prison space in terms of “civic death” and as a tool to describe the penitentiary’s interior spaces, I will reenact the processional ritual that reifies that metaphorical death. All of these topics are situated within a context of the incongruent policies or theories as reflected in the unreconciled spaces of Eastern State Penitentiary. And as a conclusion, the last section of this essay will look at the role that tourism has played and continues to play in this unique architectural space and will offer ways for the non-incarcerated reader of this document to offer some resistance to the prison system as American culture moves towards the abolition of the failed prison system.

CHAPTER 3: THE ARTIFACT: STYLES FOR UNRECONCILED SPACES

In 1870 Robert Newell produced an albumen print of the entrance of Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia (Figure 7). At the time this image was recorded, the prison had been in operation for forty-one years. In a letter to the commission assigned by the state of Pennsylvania to erect a penitentiary in the city of Philadelphia, the British born architect John Haviland (1792-1852) himself had referred to the style of his design for this façade as “Anglo-Norman”⁵¹ (Figure 7).

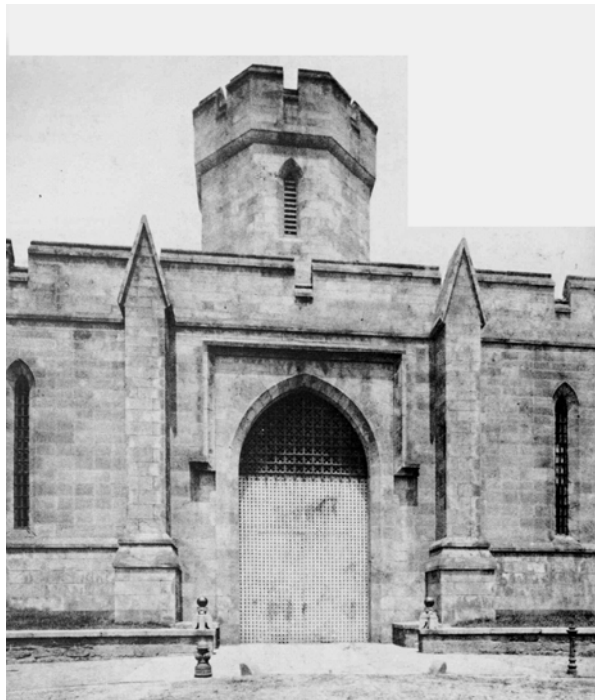


Figure 7. *Eastern State Penitentiary Front Gate.*

Front gate and only entrance to Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, before alterations in the 1920s. It is important to note the fortress-like style of this structure. What is the nature of the symbolism of the castellated ornamentation? What is this enormous walled structure hiding or revealing, protecting or antagonizing?⁵²

⁵¹ Johnston, 36.

⁵² Norman Johnston, *Crucible of Good Intentions*. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1994, 2000, Robert Newell (active 1856-1903), Entrance to Eastern State Penitentiary, c. 1870. Albumen print. 9 1/4 x 7 3/8. The Library Company of Philadelphia).

Examining the history of the prison, Norman Johnston, in his book *Eastern State Penitentiary, Crucible of Good Intentions*, refers to the style of the façade as “restrained gothic.”⁵³ Norman is suggesting there existed a more developed gothic aesthetic from which Haviland drew inspiration. He is implying that Haviland’s final product was a distillation of an established aesthetic of Anglo-Norman or gothic architecture. Before analyzing the validity and symbolism of these terms I will delineate to what structures the terms are applied. The surrounding wall of Eastern State Penitentiary is one of two very distinct yet disconnected architectural masses in Haviland’s design. Hidden inside the mass of the wall is a separate structure that is the actual building used to house the prisoners, as can be seen in the bird’s eye view and plan in Figure 8. If Haviland designed these two structures in differing styles, which of these two separate structures is the overarching defining architectural style of the prison? Or which of these two structures defines this site as “prison” or an architectural building type called prison? Is the wall a more defining factor or it the interior cellular structure that housed the prisoners. Or is it a combination of the two? Did John Haviland conceive of these two structures as separate structures, on his own, without any input from the board of directors? I will demonstrate that Haviland did not conceive of the wall as part of his original plan and that it was the influence of the board that forced him to include the wall in a second plan submitted to the board, and perhaps the inclusion of the wall was even a condition on which his obtaining the commission depended.

⁵³ Ibid.

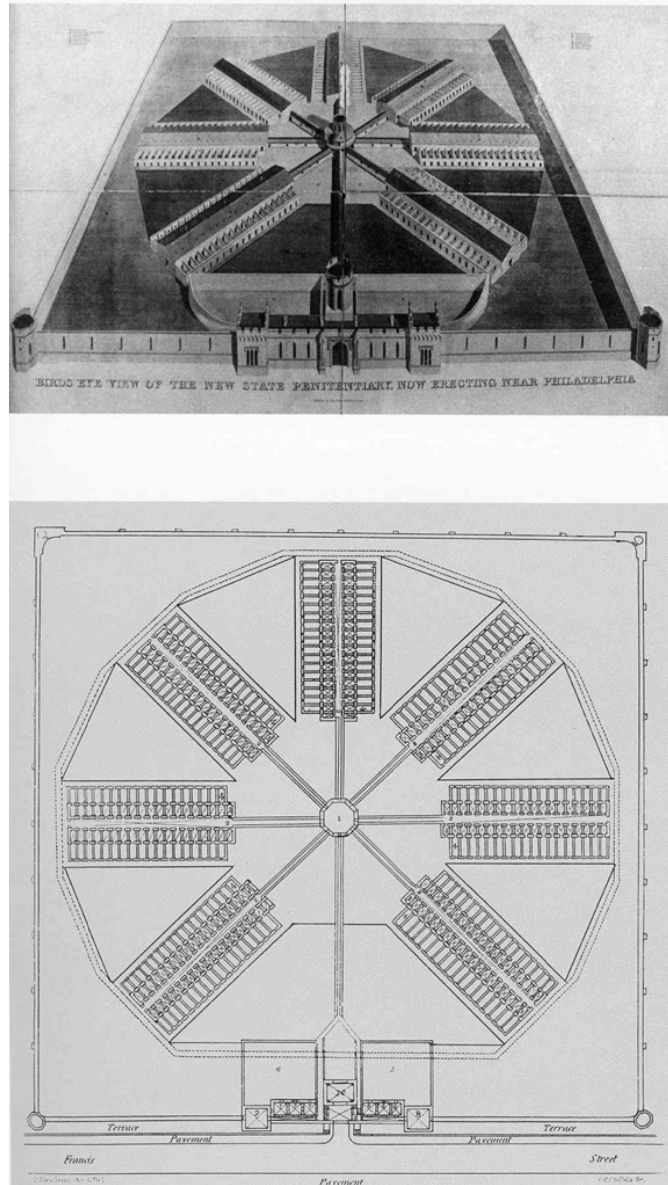


Figure 8. C.G. Childs's *Eastern State Penitentiary Bird's-eye View and Plan*. After John Haviland, *Bird's Eye View of the New State Penitentiary, Now Erecting Near Philadelphia*, 1824, Engraving by C. G. Childs Free Library of Philadelphia, and *Plan of the Eastern State Penitentiary*, c. 1829. Engraving by C. G. Childs From George W. Smith, *A View and Description of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia C.G. Childs, 1830). These two views appear to show the wall as being connected to the interior building in two different ways. Neither is correct. The wall is and was an entirely separate structure.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid, 37.

Letters and minutes from meetings that reside in the archives of the State of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg suggest that the wall, and especially the style of the wall, was not a part of Haviland's original design. The gothic features of the wall sit in contrast to the uniquely anomalous style of the interior building. I also posit that the choice of the gothic style was not determined by Haviland, but rather by "The Board of Commissioners for the Erection of a State Penitentiary."⁵⁵ That the board would determine a style, any style, for the wall has symbolic value pertaining to the power of patronage and state control of architectural aesthetic production in civic building and in turn, control of any message intended by that aesthetic production. But moreover, it is the particular style that was chosen, the gothic, and the myriad connotations of that style in which it was built that renders even more strength to the wall as a symbol: historically, culturally and politically. The gothic had very specific connotations in America in the antebellum period. The gothic in the case of Eastern State Penitentiary has many contradictory implications that do not coincide with other buildings that were built in an American Gothic Revival architecture movement. The most obvious contradiction is the overarching heaviness in the design of Eastern State Penitentiary's stone wall in opposition to the complexity and heavenly lightness that was achieved in Gothic Revival ecclesiastical and domestic architecture in America and England (England being the conduit of the architecture of the French Middle Ages, the armature of Gothic Revivalism, hence the name "Anglo-Norman."). In these other cases, a complexity of line was achieved through a multiplicity of ribbing in wood and plaster or stone. The gothic in the case of the three images in Figure 9, Figure 10 and Figure 11, while impressive, suggests movement and permeability that is crushed in the stone solidity of the Eastern State Penitentiary wall.

⁵⁵ Pennsylvania State Archives, "Minutes of the Board of Commissioners for the Erection of a State Penitentiary, Including Rough Copies 1821-1845" RG 15 (3 boxes), Harrisburg, PA.

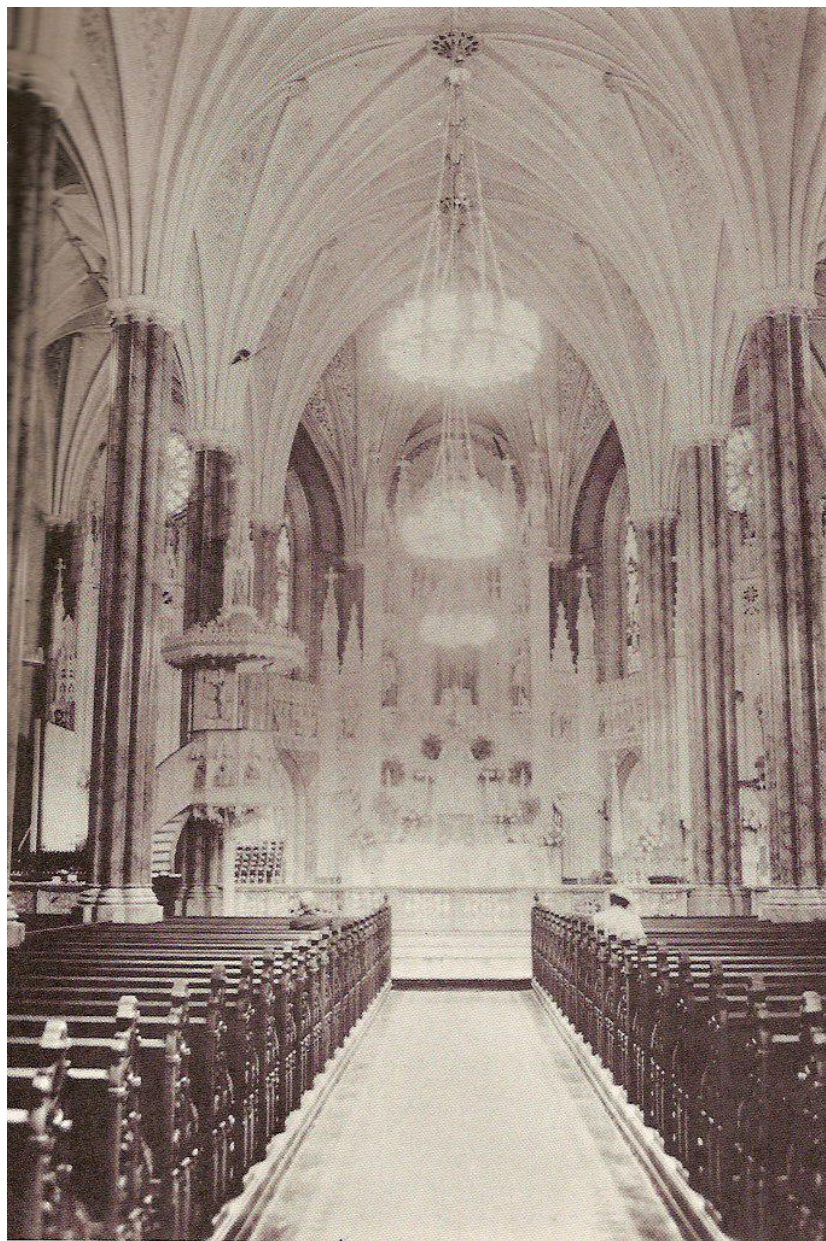


Figure 9. *St. Alphonsus', Baltimore.*

While the composition of this church is mostly stone and glass, the complex crossing arches that open into stained glass fenestration gives a feeling of lightness and air and extends the eye and the mind upward, beyond the glass, towards heaven. The broken planes, the multiplicity of levels and complexity of pattern lends lightness to this structure that is unavailable in the message exuding from the architecture of Eastern State Penitentiary.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Phoebe B. Stanton, *The Gothic Revival & American Church Architecture, An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 233.



Figure 10. *St. Luke's, Baltimore.*

While wood is the primary material in this interior, a similar feeling of lightness prevails and for both this image and in Figure 9, the gothic style is used in quite a different manner than in the wall of Eastern State.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Ibid, 303.

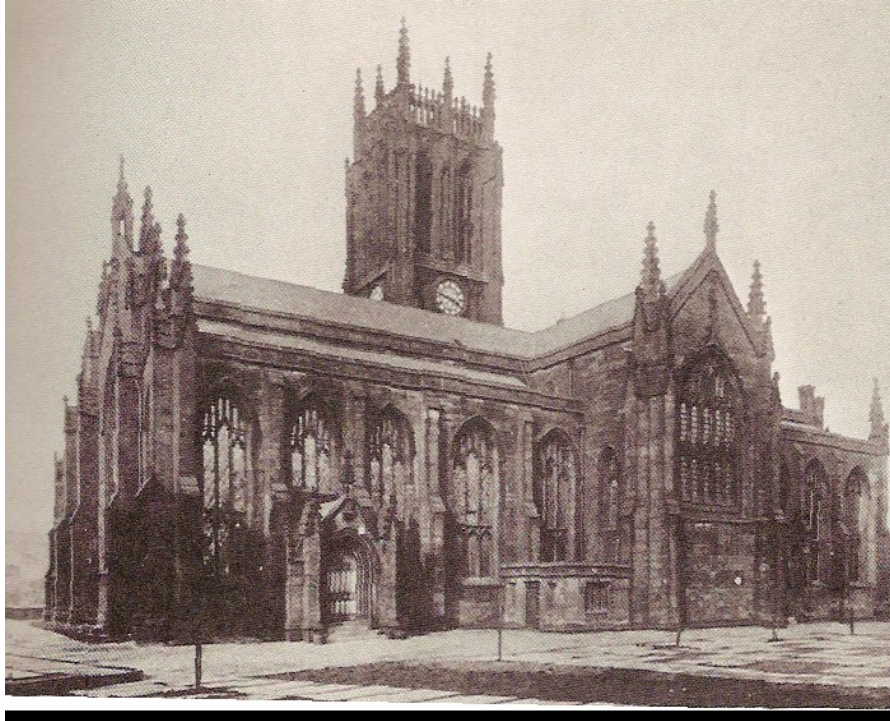


Figure 11. *New St Peter's Leeds*, Southwest view. R. D. Chantrell 1837-41. This Anglo-Norman or English Gothic Revival church from an exterior view, further emphasizes the lightness that is achieved by the broken planes, repeated and differing scaled patterns of pointed arches, and ribbon like fenestration. All of these features add to an agenda of lightness and heavenliness even though the structure is made primarily of heavy stone. Again, this is quite a different effect than is produced by the “restrained gothic” wall of Eastern State Penitentiary.⁵⁸

In nineteenth-century literature, the gothic connoted heaviness in tone concerning subject matter but a lightness in its complexity of narrative.⁵⁹ In institutional (ecclesiastical) gothic architecture, both in the Middle Ages and in the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival in Europe and England, stone was used in a specific way to achieve a contradictory heavenly lightness as opposed to the heaviness of earthly existence. This will be explored more graphically later in the essay but in

⁵⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁹ For tools of expression concerning contradictory definitions in terms of lightness and heaviness in literature that can be applied outside of literature, Italo Calvino, “Lightness” in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc., 1988, 1993).

American Gothic ecclesiastical and domestic architecture, while stone was sometimes used, it was most often utilized to quite a different effect than its use at Eastern State.

Returning to tools used in Gothic literature, imagination and sympathy also have a place in the design of Eastern State Penitentiary.⁶⁰ It was Benjamin Rush in his penal theories who was looking to exploit these literary tools in his imagining of a new prison architecture. Philadelphia physician and penal reformer and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush provided the armature for the Gothic style for prison building in his address to the first meeting of Philadelphia Society for Alleviating Miseries of Public Prisons, held in 1776 at the home of Benjamin Franklin. In Rush's first dictum referring to an imagined building type, he poses a poetics of prison building:

Let a large house, of a construction agreeable to a design be erected in a remote part of the state, Let the avenue to this house be rendered difficult and gloomy by mountains or morasses. Let its doors be of iron; and let the grating, occasioned by opening and shutting them, be encreased, by an echo from a neighboring mountain, that shall deeply pierce the soul. Let a guard constantly attend at a gate that shall lead to this place of punishment, to prevent strangers from entering it. Let all the officers of the house be strictly forbidden to ever discover any signs of mirth, or even levity, in the presence of the criminals. To encrease the horror of this abode of discipline and misery, let it be called by some name to import its design.⁶¹

It is clear from this excerpt that Rush saw the building as performing in a few ways that can be understood as literary, beginning with the act of naming. It was to be a site of punishment (not rehabilitation). A name was to be chosen that would poetically "encrease the horror" of the site. A name was to be created for the prison

⁶⁰ Jason Frank, "Sympathy and Separation: Benjamin Rush and the Contagious Public," in *Modern Intellectual History*, Volume 6, Issue 1, April 2009, pp 27-57.

Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: seduction and democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Benjamin Rush quoted from his "A Plan for the Punishment of Crime," in Peter Okun, *Crime and the nation: prison reform and popular fiction in Philadelphia, 1786-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

and that name was to perform in two ways: the horror was to be exhibited in the name itself and that name and its related horror were to be reflected in the design of the structure.

The wall of Eastern State Penitentiary performed in contrast to the interior structure of the prison building. While very different in style and function, both structures were in many ways innovations in American prison design. Yet these two very different structures were never reconciled in their individual designs and in how each structure related to the other. Naming the styles of each structure also differed greatly, the wall being defined as “Gothic” or “Anglo-Norman” and the interior as “Neo-classical.”⁶² The intrinsic nature of the wall surrounding the interior structure succeeds in silencing the “neo-classical” design of the interior structure, at least for an audience or viewing public. If neo-classical, then one aspect that would be essential within classical architectural vocabulary is the audience’s perception of the building as a massed volume. When considering the interior building of Eastern State Penitentiary, while a unique massed volume exists, it is undetectable in its totality in a visual way from any single point of view. Unable to be viewed in full from the outside, blatantly blocked by the wall, the interior massed volume is also undetectable from any single point of view from within the interior of the central building. A complete view of the interior structure, whatever style it may be, is hidden within the Gothic prison wall. If the interior structure was not surrounded by a wall, the radial plan of the interior building could be witnessed as a spectacularly notable architectural structure in the context of public architecture in antebellum Philadelphia. Instead, the spectacular perception of this institution was of the almost blank orthogonal exterior wall. A view of the interior structure could only be viewed in part from inside the

⁶² Johnston, 37. Whether or not the interior cell structure of Eastern State Penitentiary is indeed in the neoclassical style, as Johnston suggests, will be addressed later in this essay.

walls with very little distance from the architectural object and only then by a very select group of witnesses. The mass of the interior space, from the perspective inside the interior building, could also only be viewed in part, and from limited vantage points. To return to the bird's eye view and plan (Figure 12), the wall encloses the entire interior structure with very few, small spaces available to position the viewer in an advantageous visual vantage point.

When inside the interior structure, the largest volume of space that could be viewed was from the central hub and only a portion of any single part of that interior space. It was only possible to peer down the full length of only one of the radial corridors at a time and only a portion of the other radials was available from any single point of view. What was available from any of those interior vantage points can be seen in the photograph in Figure 13, taken in the late nineteenth-century.

The discrete character of each building (the wall and radial structure) and the incongruent nature of the two built entities when held in comparison (the wall and the prison building) together carve out a negative space between the two massed volumes. This residual space emphasizes that the two structures are un-reconciled in proportion, function and aesthetic. Incongruence in the anatomy (an orthogonal wall as opposed to circular spokes) of the two structures is paralleled by incongruence in style. The interior structure is built in a style that has been loosely termed by Johnston as neoclassical, in contrast to his reference to the “restrained gothic” style of the wall.

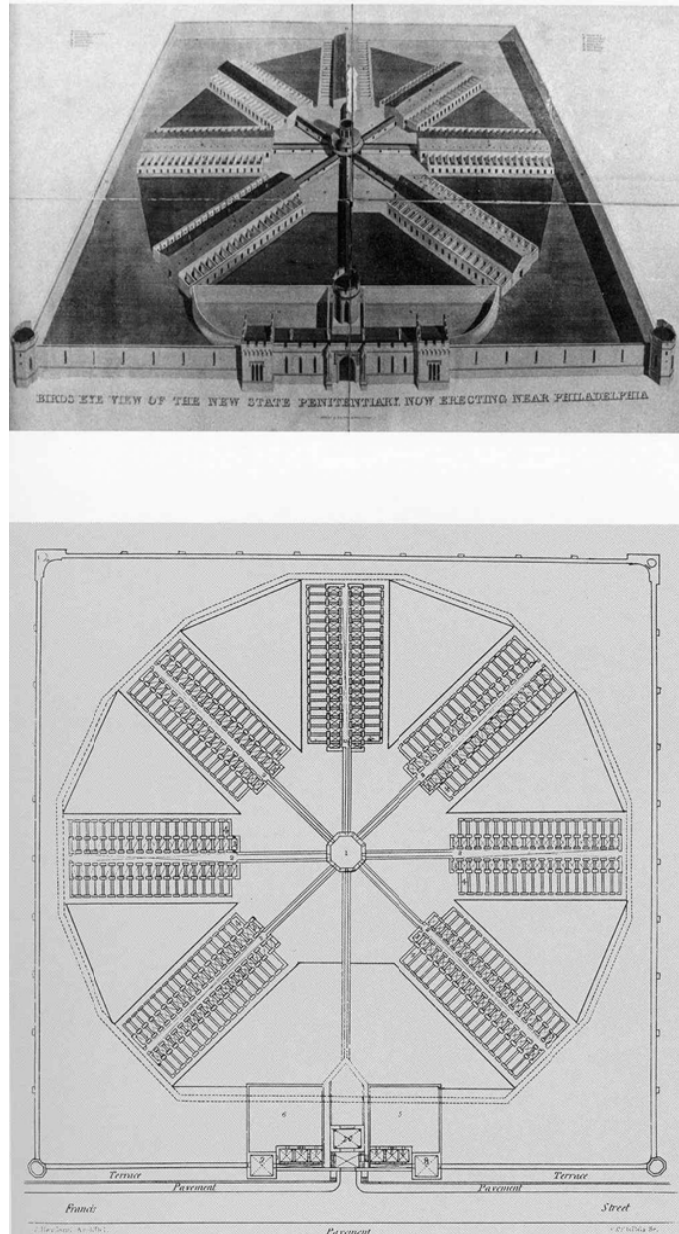


Figure 12. C.G. Childs's *Eastern State Penitentiary Bird's-eye View and Plan*. These drawings are misleading, showing the wall and interior structure as being connected in two different ways. The Bird's eye view shows a semi-elliptical wall connecting the two front radial wings whereas the plan shows what seems to be an interior wall connecting each of the wings to one another and to the front entrance. Neither of these interpretations is correct. The interior building was always completely detached from the exterior wall and there was never an interior wall encasing the radial structure.⁶³

⁶³ Ibid, 37.

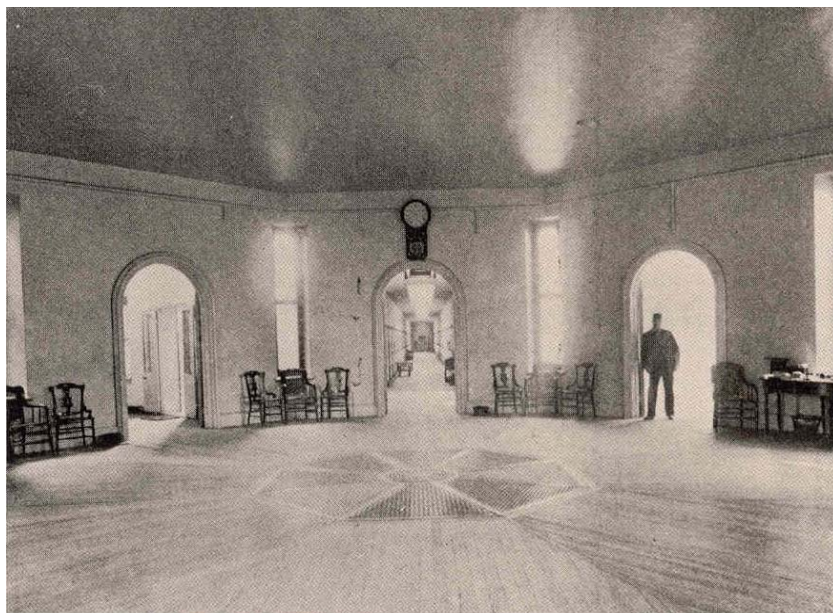


Figure 13. *Eastern State Penitentiary Central Hub.*

In this image, the perspective from one end of the central hub, looking across the central space, the viewer is only able to peer down to the end of one corridor at a time. Moving to the very center of the rotunda, still only one corridor can be viewed at a time in its entirety without shifting the gaze. Gaining visual access to the length of another corridor required a repositioning of the body.⁶⁴

The dichotomous architectonics and aesthetics of wall and building reflect more complex and more affecting incompatibilities between prison policy and prison practice. This separation of policy and practice has been essential to the successful ideological functioning of American penology and at the same time, paradoxically, its failure. If policy and practice were congruent, there would be less need for hiding the functions of prison. The surreptitious nature of prison practice or the intentional obfuscation of the actual horrors that occur in prisons, allows for the persistent operation of the prison system. What is written in prison policy is rarely what is enacted in prison practice. If prison practice were made more transparent to the daily lives of a hopefully judicious public, it is possible that prison policies and prison practices would be held up to more scrutiny and authorities held more accountable for

⁶⁴ Ibid, 55.

the abuses of human rights that occur on a daily basis within prison walls. Another related incompatibility tied to this system is a trichotomy between the already dichotomous pairing of prison policy against prison practice (as it is enacted by prison authorities) played against the actual lived culture produced by prisoners in their daily activities. The actual lived experiences of prisoners as a community contradicts both prison policy as dictated by those who write the policies and is in further opposition to the actual behaviors of the those in charge: wardens, guards, nurses, doctors and others in administrative positions. There are also incompatibilities between the intended social symbolism of the institution and the actual hermeneutics of the building as cultural performance, and between developing individual political ambitions pitted against the legitimization of an oppressive class structure within the new republic of America. The distinction this essay begins to examine is limited to the aesthetic, considering form, function and style, and problems of style, but remains reflective of other concerns listed above.

CHAPTER 4: RESURRECTING, RE-DEFINING AND DECONSTRUCTING STYLE

In opposition to the “restrained Gothic” or the Anglo-Norman façade, historian Norman Johnston also refers to the style of the interior structure of Eastern State Penitentiary as Neoclassical. Not only in relation to Eastern State Penitentiary, defining neoclassicism can be a nebulous and complicated project. For the last two centuries, many scholars have made convincing arguments towards defining the term, yet the effort often escapes the exactitude of a definition that can be applied universally.⁶⁵ Also, a definition often fails when used for analyses of the stylistic motivations of an architect when most historians’ (or architects acting as their own historians) attempts at definitions are either prescriptive or made after the fact of the building’s construction. Acknowledging the absence of a precise explanation of neoclassicism might not concern this essay except that the ideological implications of an architect’s use of a neoclassical style in a prison are immensely important. If the goal of an exact definition were not pursued, at least specificity of a stylistic trajectory of the architect of Eastern State, John Haviland, or evidence of his proclivity towards neoclassicism would certainly be edifying. The term neoclassicism is often employed, as Johnston employs it, to imply self-evidence in its signification as well as its definition, that is, the aesthetic effects of neo-classicism as opposed to the formal qualities defining it as such. While the term *neoclassicism* has been used to refer to numerous artistic, social and political realms, this essay assumes Johnston to be referring to neoclassical architecture in an unconscious assumption that neoclassicism

⁶⁵ For more on the debates concerning debates on the periodization of architecture and the ensuing ambivalence of defining terms see: R. Middleton, and D. Watkin, *Architecture of the Nineteenth Century*, Milano: Electraarchitecture, Phaidon Press, 1980), 68-78; Michael McCarthy, *Classical and Gothic, Studies in the History of Art* (Cornwall, UK: Four Courts Press, 2005); and Françoise Choay, *The Rule and the Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

is an amalgamation of antique forms. Antiquity is an expansive field that can refer to a multitude of points within several thousand years and across vast geographic and cultural divides. To refer to classicism in architecture can mean that the root of neoclassical forms could be drawn from Greek, Roman, Etruscan and/or Egyptian although some camps of thought have located the argument for classicism as being singularly Greek in origin, and even if looking to that singularity, this would still not be an uncomplicated problem.

American interpretations of these numerous original styles of architecture thrived in architectural revivals all across America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, drawing from similar tendencies in Europe being employed co-terminously. While Johnston's assumptive assertion concerning Haviland's tendency towards neoclassicism is not necessarily wrong, it lacks an accuracy that would be essential in determining the how and why of Haviland's choices. Haviland made precise design choices but what can his motivations reveal about the specific type of civic structure he was designing? This is especially problematic when dealing with the conflicting styles that Haviland finally employed in his contradictory wall versus radial design. In order to unfold an historical context and reveal the importance of style and its signification in this context, it will be helpful at this point to briefly analyze some of the possible trajectories and polemics of nineteenth-century architectural revivals of antique architectural styles. The goal here is to illuminate some of the questions raised by Haviland's choice of conflicting styles (although I bring into question the "neoclassicism" of the interior structure) and to begin to understand the manner in which this building's components performed as civic signs in public structures in antebellum Philadelphia.

Nineteenth-century architectural revivals were not simply aesthetic movements but were bound to concepts of social reform implying a particular morality not as

readily recognized when attached to twentieth-century architectural innovations.⁶⁶

Looking for the seed of social reform buried deep in what is often perceived as purely aesthetic architectural revival movements can lead to understanding the ways in which architecture can be comprehended as the foundation for general social reform and how these movements relate to penal reform.

⁶⁶ A moral component existed in the modern movement concerning such architects as Gropius and Le Corbusier. Although Watkin has explored this tendency, there is room for more extensive exploration in this area especially considering the implications of moral judgment in specific building types such as prisons and other civic building. My interest in morality and modern architecture is moving in a direction of domestic spaces and will be further examined in a future project.

CHAPTER 5: PERIODIZING IN ORDER TO REVIVE ARCHITECTURE

Occidental periodization of architecture as Greek, Etruscan, Egyptian or Gothic began in eighteenth-century Europe. At that time, looking back to styles from previous epochs, as antique architectural styles were being uncovered in Italy and Greece through the new science of archeology, an effort to categorize styles was undertaken and extensively debated by scholars, architects, artists, critics and even tourists (although it is important to recognize that the concept of tourist in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries would have completely different connotations that it would in the twenty-first-century).⁶⁷ Gothic architecture, the style said to have been employed in the design of the wall and façade of Eastern State Penitentiary, originally developed in France in the middle ages, particularly emanating from medieval ecclesiastical architecture. In these debates, the Gothic Revival was set in opposition to a Greek Revival movement in architecture and this contrast to the Greek eventually came to include Roman, Etruscan and Egyptian architecture. Europeans and Americans extensively debated and defined the terms and often vehemently recommended choices of building style among these various options.⁶⁸ Proponents of Greek revivalism, as an eighteenth-century choice for new building, promoted the primary procedure of an interpretation of Greek architecture as pure in opposition to what was considered the tainted eclectic value of combining Greek with Roman, Etruscan or Egyptian architectural revivalists styles. All of these styles, as revivals, were attempts to reinstitute a golden age aesthetic, perceived as having been severed, lost or distorted in the course of the Renaissance. And more than regaining lost structures, revivals were an attempt to regain a trajectory towards idealism that was

⁶⁷ Middleton and Watkin, 68-78.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

believed by some Enlightenment architects to have been thwarted during the rationality of the Renaissance.⁶⁹ The goal in the trajectory towards idealism was understood to have never been achieved (by definition, an ideal) in the histories of Greek, Roman, Etruscan and Egyptian architecture. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century revivalist impulses were spurred by the belief that utopian ideals of past cultures had not wholly disappeared but had been buried in the perceived utopian failures of architects, particularly, Palladio.⁷⁰ The works of Renaissance architects were seen as having forced an order and proportionality that by the eighteenth century, through Enlightenment ideals, were proving to be false, and therefore needed to be rectified by readdressing the utopian trajectories of antiquity.⁷¹

It would be a misstep not to recognize the moral connotations of these aesthetic movements. Architectural reform paralleled social, political, economic and cultural reforms and while architecture is somewhat abstract in nature, revival movements in architecture nevertheless contain conceits of moral reformation. The very notion of reform in any sense implies a moral judgment and an even stronger implication of morality is insinuated in penal policy reform and prison architectural reform. An architect engaging in a full agenda towards penal reform must create a new programme for a new building type. A prison or penitentiary programme serves a moral agenda. Morality as it is imbedded in the architectural structure of a prison, with the gravity of its moralizing policy should be more apparent to an audience than in any other civic structure. Prison building and reform were moral projects paralleling a more general reform of the morality of architectural *style*. The prison as a planned

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Michael McCarthy, *Classical and Gothic, Studies in the History of Art* (Cornwall, UK: Four Courts Press, 2005). The debate between Palladian influence over Greek, Roman or Gothic styles in American and European Architecture can be compared in part by McCarthy's study of these influences or lack thereof in Ireland.

⁷¹ Choay, 43.

ideal building type would be one of architecture's material contributions to moral or social reform.

John Haviland, in conceiving Eastern State Penitentiary, would have been affected by the aesthetic and social debates concerning architectural reform occurring a generation before him. Although he may not have pursued this topic through direct research, he more than likely imbibed these polemics through training with his mentor in England, James Elmes (1782-1820). In his own work in England, Elmes was also interested in prison architecture but less successfully than Haviland would eventually prove to be in America. Elmes published *Hints for the Improvement of Prisons*⁷² in 1817. Elmes, like his contemporary Richard Elsam, also in England, who published his own penal reform text, *Brief Treatise on Prisons*⁷³ in 1818, was looking for a definitive architectural form for prison building.⁷⁴ Unlike Haviland later, both of these more mature British architects were considered dilettantes in the practice of prison design, a practice that was at that time becoming institutionalized by the State in both England and America. By the nineteenth-century, apart from his numerous prison designs, and contrary to his aesthetic choices in prison building, Haviland preferred to build exclusively in the Greek Revival style. In 1818, Haviland published a guide to building titled *The Builder's Assistant*.⁷⁵ In three volumes, this text focused on the five classical orders. His preference for turning to Greek classical architecture as inspiration for his domestic and public designs was at odds with his habit of utilizing

⁷² James Elmes, *Hints for Improvement of Prisons* (London, W. Bulmer & Co., 1817).

⁷³ Richard Elsam, *Brief Treatise on Prisons*, 1818).

⁷⁴ Both of these architects were most likely influenced by John Howard's 1792 publication, *The State of Prisons in England and Wales*. Howard toured the numerous and various types of carceral environments in Great Britain and developed a plan for reform.

⁷⁵ John Haviland and Hugh Bridport, *The Builder's Assistant: containing the five orders of architecture, selected from the best specimens of the Greek and Roman...* (Philadelphia: published by John Bioren, 1818-1821).

Gothic and Egyptian styles in his prison façades.⁷⁶ Even though his preference was for Greek Revivalism, it is questionable that his design for the interior structure of Eastern State was created in the style that Johnston loosely refers to as a “neoclassical style.” It would follow from Haviland’s area of expertise (shown in his publication) that he would design in a Greek style, but even with his preference for the five orders, defining his interior structure at Eastern State as Greek in style is unfounded in any solid material evidence or even more importantly, any rhetorical evidence that can be drawn from Haviland himself. Haviland was deeply interested in Greek classical architecture but I am suggesting that he abandoned that style for this project in the spirit of innovation. I am arguing that Haviland understood this project to be a completely modern one and his numerous innovations both stylistically and technically support this claim. This would not exclude this project from its relationship to moral reform.⁷⁷

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century architectural revival movements were supported by ideologies of reform, both architectural and moral. Reform, whether aesthetic or social, is moral in tone. To sum up another set of concepts put forth in this essay, building in a Greek revival style was to reach into antiquity with the purpose of not only repairing the aesthetic mistakes of the Renaissance but to also improve upon the initial aesthetic goals of the Greeks.⁷⁸ Architectural revivalism should be most evident as a social agenda when applied to civic architecture and particularly when applied to prison architecture but due the surreptitious nature of prison as public

⁷⁶ Opening in 1838, Haviland designed in the Egyptian Revival style for the façade of his New York City prison nicknamed “the Tombs” While that building has since been razed and replaced with other structures, the nickname is still in use today for the jail that took its place.

⁷⁷ It is necessary to clarify why I am not approaching the issue of Quakerism in this analysis since Eastern State Penitentiary has often been referred to as a “Quaker prison.” Given more time, I would show this misnomer to be a rhetorical tool used to garner support for the prison. There is nothing Quaker about this prison, especially considering what was “Quaker” in Philadelphia at the time of this prison’s birth. It was not conceived or built by Quakers but by Philadelphians, not all Quakers.

⁷⁸ Choay, 42.

performance, this agenda is somewhat obfuscated. Nineteenth-century reform in architectural style was mirrored in prison policy reforms and prison building practices.

In both Europe and America, attempts at prison reform are extensively documented and have been thoroughly examined in the field of critical theory and political theory.⁷⁹ While many of these efforts include specific architectural reforms in the invention of various examples of the prison as an emerging architectural type, architectural policy reform in its own right flourished, separate from, but of course connected to prison building. Axiomatically, theorizing new forms of penology required building new prisons while experiments in new prison building required newer prison reforms. In a related gesture, theorizing new ways of building all forms of architecture also flourished and continued into the modern period, the postmodern period and has continued to present day architectural design principles. It is what defines architectural study at Cornell and most other top ranked professional architecture schools today, continuous innovation which can be read as reform.

Analogies must be drawn between new ways of building in general and new ways of building prisons. In the relationship between architecture and social reform, the practice of general architectural reform was to become bound to reforms in penology. The excitement of aesthetic and technological advances authorized by new prison building are also part of what enabled the prison system to flourish over the next two hundred years, in spite of the evidence of constant failure. The intoxication of grand new building in the realm of penology led to constant denial of the failure of that actual system. The nature of the architectural morphology of the prison wall, and its intention of hiding the actions occurring behind the wall, allowed the faults of the

⁷⁹ The most notable architectural type in this category is the concept of the “Panopticon.” It was initially designed and theorized by eighteenth-century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Although never constructed by Bentham himself, the “Panopticon” was built in several instances by other architects and is famously analyzed as a historical social phenomenon by Michel Foucault in his 1977 text, *Discipline and Punish*.

prison system to remain clouded and to persist unexamined, or at least sequestered and left unaddressed by an increasingly unconcerned and uninformed public. This denial of information also produced an effluence of imagination within the public sector, an intentional result in the original plan of Benjamin Rush. But it is more than a sequestering of practices and an excitement at innovation that enabled prisons to persist. A romanticized aesthetic enveloping prison culture also allowed prisons to grow on a metaphorical level without any empirical validation of the site.

In searching for an aesthetic foundation for that romanticism and imaginative flourishing, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) emerges in the position as arbiter of revivalist architectural styles. He was specifically interested in prisons as a specific spatial type and he had a tendency to exhibit all architectural types as theatrical performance.⁸⁰ In looking at architecture as performance, this essay presents an analysis of a defining performative element of Eastern State Penitentiary, its wall.

⁸⁰ For more on Piranesi and his connection to the architectural imagination and specifically his connection to incarceration, see the next section of this essay.

CHAPTER 6: THE MATERIAL STRUCTURE

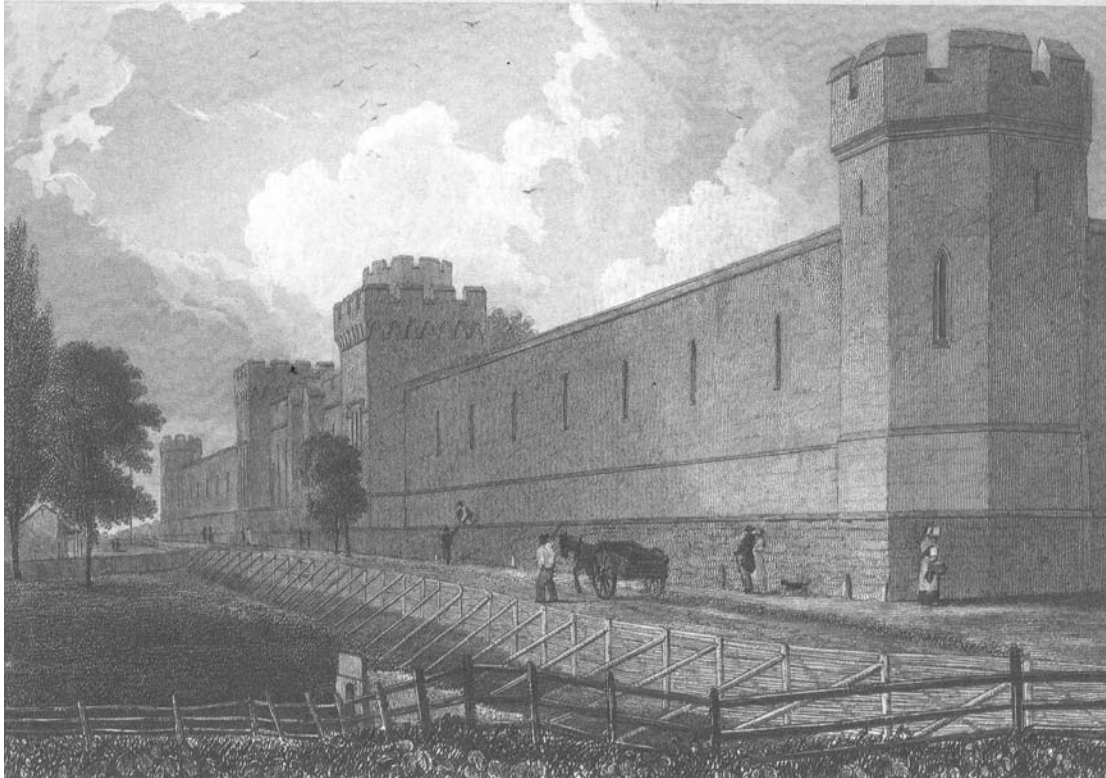


Figure 14. *C. Burton's Eastern State Penitentiary*. Hand-colored steel engraving c. 1831. This representation sets the Gothic features of the Penitentiary wall in a rural setting, but still as a component of the civic communal fabric.⁸¹

The façade wall of Eastern State Penitentiary was built from hewn and squared granite cut from a nearby quarry, the Falls of Schuylkill. The base of the wall is twelve feet thick extending sixteen feet into the ground. At the height of the thirty-foot wall, it is only two and three-quarters feet thick. The receiving area, administrative offices and the warden's apartment are directly behind the entrance which spans less than a fifth of the entire façade and is directly in the central 200 feet of the 670-foot front wall (Figure 14).

⁸¹ Johnston, *Crucible of Good Intentions*, Front cover.

Only 13% of the mass of the wall surrounding the ten-acre site includes any intrinsic interior spaces; the intake rooms, administration and warden's offices. The prison building itself is separated from this wall. The symmetry of the Gothic façade of the wall, while betraying what could be called true Gothic style, nonetheless reveals a neoclassic tendency of the architect. In fact, this façade can be said to be more Palladian than Greek (although a distorted Palladian) with its tripartite symmetry of a central block built around the axis of the entranceway, and two symmetrical flanking blocks with pilasters. Other Palladian tendencies evident in Eastern State are its axial planning and the search for harmonious proportions (see Figure 15 and Figure 16).

Proportion and symmetry in the work of Palladio are classical tendencies but not necessarily authentic Roman reproductions. For Palladio, proportion had to be controlled in a relationship between the flanking blocks to the central block and this is the same for John Haviland in the case of Eastern State Penitentiary. Triadic symmetry is displayed in elevations of both Eastern State Penitentiary and Palladio's Villa Godi. Haviland's horizontal extension would have been unusual for Palladio but not out of the question. This comparison shows that while extended, Palladio's triadic symmetry is reflected in Eastern State. For Haviland, and for his peers, architects such as William Strickland, the motivation for building in a neoclassical style was not to adhere to the past but to improve on the past, with the understanding that the classical ideal was never fully realized in the classical period. Haviland more often than not designed in a Greek inspired neoclassical style but with Eastern State, Haviland's veering from a Greek style towards innovation in the interior building and with his use of the Gothic (or Egyptian in the case of the Tombs in New York) style was to begin with this site in Philadelphia.

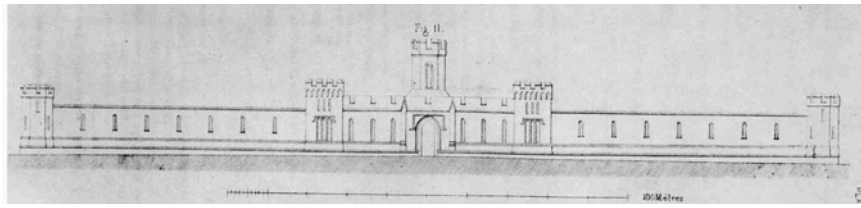


Figure 15. *Elevation of Eastern State Penitentiary.*⁸²

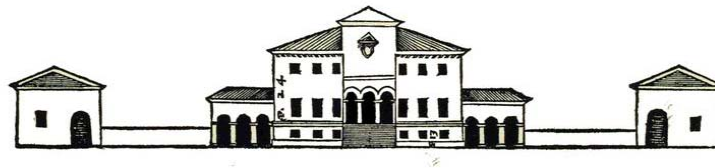


Figure 16. *Palladio's Villa Godi.*⁸³

Viewing the penitentiary from the perspective of a passerby, the wall clearly exhibits a castellated central watchtower and battlements along the top of the prison wall (see Figure 15). At the time of construction these morphologies served no practical purpose for those employed by or incarcerated inside the penitentiary. These elements served only an aesthetic purpose and were to deliver a message of gothicism to a viewing public. The central tower has never been used for guarding the prison from escapees or from intruders. In the last years of operation as a penitentiary, the top level of the central tower had been used as a ventilated storage space and there is nothing essential in its design to show that it was intended for this purpose. But whatever its lack of practical use within the prison, the watchtower and battlements

⁸² Plan of Eastern State Penitentiary from Demetz and Blouet, 1837 in: Johnston, *Crucible of Good Intentions*, P 42.

⁸³ Andrea Palladio, Villa Godi, drawing from *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*, http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://schools-wikipedia.org/images/299/29924.jpg&imgrefurl=http://schools-wikipedia.org/wp/p/Palladian_architecture.htm&usq=C9rpIglDvIjPKlef6DxhAwAghsQ=&h=153&w=250&sz=4&hl=en&start=7&sig2=PcEFVVkcPqawind9zbLJNw&um=1&itbs=1&tbnid=mrTRGIId1ZVKoiM:&tbnh=68&tbnw=111&prev=/images%3Fq%3DQuattro%2BLibri%2Bdell%2527Architettura%2Bwiki%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dsafari%26sa%3DN%26rls%3Den%26tbs%3Disch:1&ei=fVfTS8PgIoKclgeim42xDw (accessed April 23 2009).

served as symbols of strength, gloom and dread for those on the outside of the penitentiary space. In the excerpt from Rush proposing a description of prison space, the intent of a prison space to signify strength, gloom and dread was theorized by Rush decades before an actual plan of Eastern State came into being. Before examining the lineage of rhetorical principles that pushed Eastern State into existence, I will continue with an aesthetic morphological analysis of the site.

Like the ornamental watchtower, castellation and battlements, the lancet fenestration on the front prison wall was also intended as symbolic ornament as the windows never actually operated to allow light or air to enter the interior space. In the original design of the wall, the fenestration gives the impression the windows had been sealed from the inside when in fact the windows had never been opened (Figure 17). This false closure supplies the illusion of the prison space being intentionally and emphatically closed off from the free social world. This message was delivered to a non-incarcerated public, not the inmates, since from the interior, there was no evidence of any fenestration at all. In traditional Gothic architecture from medieval cathedrals to Anglo-Norman Gothic structures, the use of windows operated quite differently. Pointed fenestration filled with stained glass in Gothic cathedrals combined with a lacey interplay of ribbons carved into stone to give a feeling of lightness and was a result of the interplay of arches and piers throughout the entire structure.

The interwoven motif of arches and piers engaged the lancets or pointed arches filled with stained glass windows in the medieval churches. It inspired the early nineteenth-century secular Gothic Revival of which Eastern State can be understood as a part. In traditional Gothic architecture, interaction of thin stone bands and stained glass produced an appearance of heavenly weightlessness contrary to the heavy stone from which the ecclesiastical structure was built.

At Eastern State, the lanceted windows seen in Figure 17, rather than appearing out of the intertwined ribbons of stone as already seen in Figure 9 or wood in Figure 10, seem to have been carved into the heavy stone wall and then sealed shut.



Figure 17. *Eastern State Penitentiary Front Wall Fenestration.*

A close-up detail of fenestration on the front wall of Eastern State Penitentiary on either side of the central tower. It appears to have been sealed shut with some type of concrete or plaster but these windows were never open. They were designed to look as though they had been closed off as an effort towards increased security or seclusion.⁸⁴

Rather than a simple reduction of the implied weightlessness through distillation, subtraction or reduction of the Gothic style suggested by Johnston's

⁸⁴ Marcantonis, April 21, 2009.

phrase “restrained gothic,” the seemingly forced impression of sealed fenestration of Eastern State worked to reinforce the integral strength of the granite fortress⁸⁵ wall rather than accentuate lightness through a glorious laciness of religiously inspired stained glass windows. Also at Eastern State, at the only entrance, the heavy iron of the portcullis and massive heavy oak doors studded with iron rivets (seen clearly in Figure 7, and seen peeking over the 1930s alterations of the front entrance in Figure 18) also gave an impression of the strength and enhanced the perception of an imposing segregation of criminal from public. Benjamin Rush was also looking for a door similar to this door just described. “Let its doors be of iron; and let the grating, occasioned by opening and shutting them, be encreased, by an echo from a neighboring mountain, that shall deeply pierce the soul.”⁸⁶ It is important to note the contradictions or comparisons of style between textual representations and drawn or painted representations of Eastern State Penitentiary. And equally important to nitice is the poetic license taken in photographs of the site, even more misleading because of

⁸⁵ The use of the term “fortress” is *intentionally ambivalent* and perhaps fortress-like is more appropriate. See Harry Elmer Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 143. The American Correctional Association, *The American Prison, from the beginning, A Pictorial History* (College Park, MD: 1983) 230. “Newer ≠ Better: Correctional architectural design is getting away from old, fortress-type structures. More windows, fewer bars, rooms rather than cells, and closed circuit surveillance are in vogue. However, with surveillance by television and electronic gates rather than by correctional officers, some critics find the new architecture more dehumanizing than the old.” A fortress is a site of protection, protecting those who are inside from those who are outside. In this sense, it is a site of security. A prison is also a site of security but it is meant to protect those on the outside from those on the inside. Before Eastern State and other institutions like it, early prisons were housed in converted castles or fortresses, they were enclosed in city walls or within the structure of a city gate; all of these were elements of a fortress in the traditional sense. The first federal prison site in America was an abandoned copper mine in Simsbury CT. “This ‘mine shaft’ prison has sometimes been referred to as the first state prison, yet in reality, it was more akin to the sulphur pits of Rome” (*The American Prison*, p 27) said to be the inspiration for Piranesi’s *Carceri* series. In describing the aesthetic style of the wall of Eastern State Penitentiary, terms such as “castellated” and “battlements” (fortress morphologies) are used, attaching the style of the wall to Gothic castle/fortress architecture. The ambivalent interchange in this essay between numerous sets of terms, one such set including the terms penitentiary, fortress, prison, jail, gaol (the British equivalent for the American term, *jail*; they are pronounced the same) is intended to bring into question, rather than settle, any of these terms as definitive descriptions of the problematic site of the penitentiary that this essay begins to examine.

⁸⁶ Rush quoted from his “A Plan for the Punishment of Crime,” in Okun, 95

the assumption that photography is recording a reality closer to the records in other representations.

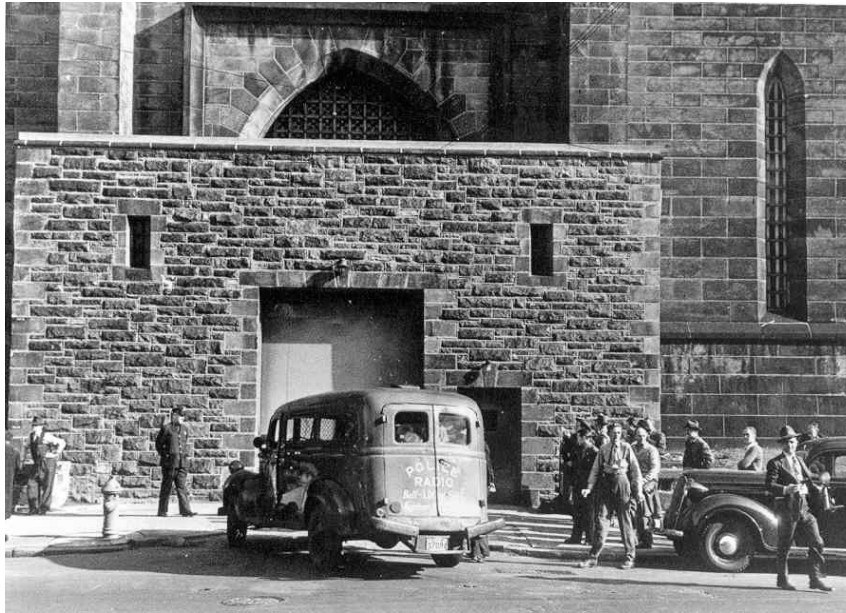


Figure 18. 1923 Front Gate Addition.
The new front gateway, erected in 1923, with the original entrance behind. From *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, April 1945.⁸⁷

As symbols of strength, these morphologies were effective, but as practical tools of security they were not. In 1923, over one hundred years after beginning operation, a new entrance was constructed in an effort to upgrade security. While almost as symmetrical as the original façade, the new structure cut across the entrance compromising the design of the grand doorway and visually severing a portion of the portcullis, entirely replacing the oak doors with a new electrically operated iron door.

The style of stone used on this addition is rougher hewn and gives the impression of less care taken in constructing what should have been a very important signifier of the building. Also the windows here are small rectangles, very different from the pointed arches in the remainder of the façade. It is unlikely these choices

⁸⁷ Johnston, *Crucible of Good Intentions*, 81.

came to be by way of oversight. By the 1920s, a different message for the community outside the prison may have been required, a message of intentional disregard for the structure and its inhabitants rather than a fabricated Gothic tone that focused on a particular mode of treatment. Solitary confinement at this point had been abandoned as a consistent goal. It was certainly still employed for some of the most transgressive prisoners, but rather than a focus of dread, the administration punished through neglect rather than direct isolation. This is an important distinction that will be developed further in another essay, but due to time and space limitations, is only offered here as a contrast to the original plan, both architecturally and in terms of policies and practices within the administration of the prison.

In 1858, James Earle McClees produced the albumen print shown in Figure 19. Compare this photograph to the watercolor in Figure 20. Both images include human figures that help the viewer realize the scale of the structure. The corner towers, like the central tower, were at first also impotent as guard posts. In the twentieth century, alterations to the corner towers were made to accommodate the guards who were to be stationed there as seen in Figure 21, Figure 22 and Figure 23, photographs taken April, 2009 by administrative staff member, Theodora Marcantonis.

The watercolor in Figure 20, created in the 1830's, shows that the ornamental façade of Eastern State most likely did have an audience of viewers. There is a crowd of visitors facing an open front gate, which would suggest they were waiting to tour the site. There is no clear evidence of what most touristic visitors did while at Eastern State (although there are records of celebrity visits like that of Charles Dickens referred to at the beginning of this essay). From this image it is at least clear that the structure did perform some type of aesthetic purpose. It is also important to note that the imagined audience in this watercolor contrasts with the workmen seen in the photograph in Figure 19. The imagined figures here are strollers, flaneurs even, while

the photographed figures seems to be taking a break from working and are actually posing with the structure to show its scale.⁸⁸



Figure 19. *Eastern State Penitentiary Albumen Print.*

This image is offered as a contrast to the engraving in Figure 14. Figure 19 is an albumen print from 1858. Figure 14 is an artist's interpretation of similar perspective. The photograph exposes what liberties were taken in the engraving/watercolor in terms of scale, in the placement of windows and in the location of the central tower. This is not to say that this photographer may have accomplished similar poetic emphases. A fuller examination of photographic interpretations of Eastern State will have to wait for another installment of this essay. Yet this single comparison visually locates the concept that this building was produced and reproduced as an aesthetic object to be read, interpreted, reread and reinterpreted.⁸⁹

As originally designed, the towers, battlements and parapets were not constructed as practical architectural devices but as signifiers of the symbolic strength of the prison. This symbolic strength was a reflection of the strength of the legitimacy of the State that had built the institution. In addition to the main wall, as seen in Figure 23, a five-foot wall was also constructed between the sidewalk and actual prison wall but only at the front of the prison. Earth fills the space between the large and small knee wall. Today, since the site has been converted to a museum, this miniature

⁸⁸ Johnston, 105.

⁸⁹ Johnston, 53.

landscape has been gardened by volunteers and now contains effusive vegetation with ivy growing in places to the full height of the prison wall seen in Figure 24.

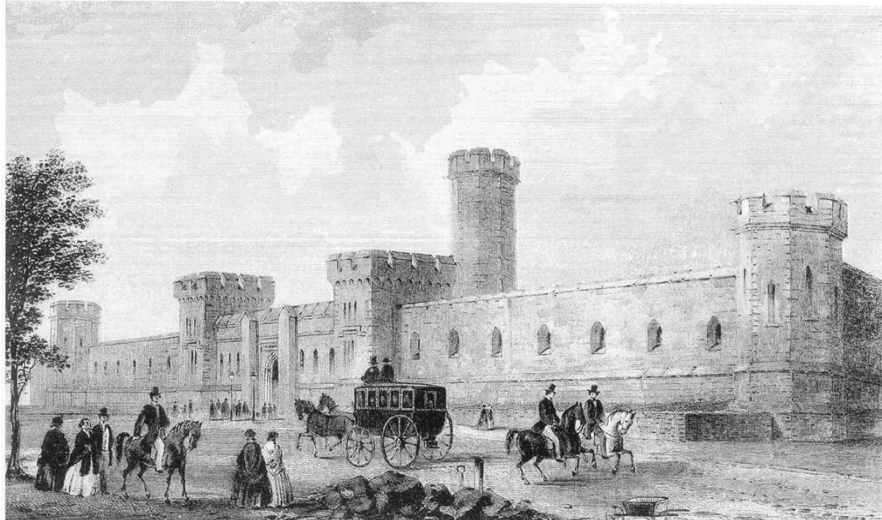


Figure 20. *Eastern State Penitentiary Watercolor.*



Figure 21. *Guard Tower Addition I.*

This is a recent close-up detail, taken from inside the prison wall, of one of the twentieth-century guard towers that were added to the corner battlements.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Marcantonis, Photo taken Tuesday April 21, 2009.



Figure 22. *Guard Tower Addition II.*
Another variation of a twentieth-century altered guard tower again taken from within the prison walls.⁹¹



Figure 23. *Guard Tower Addition III.*
And finally a third image taken from the exterior of the prison wall.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

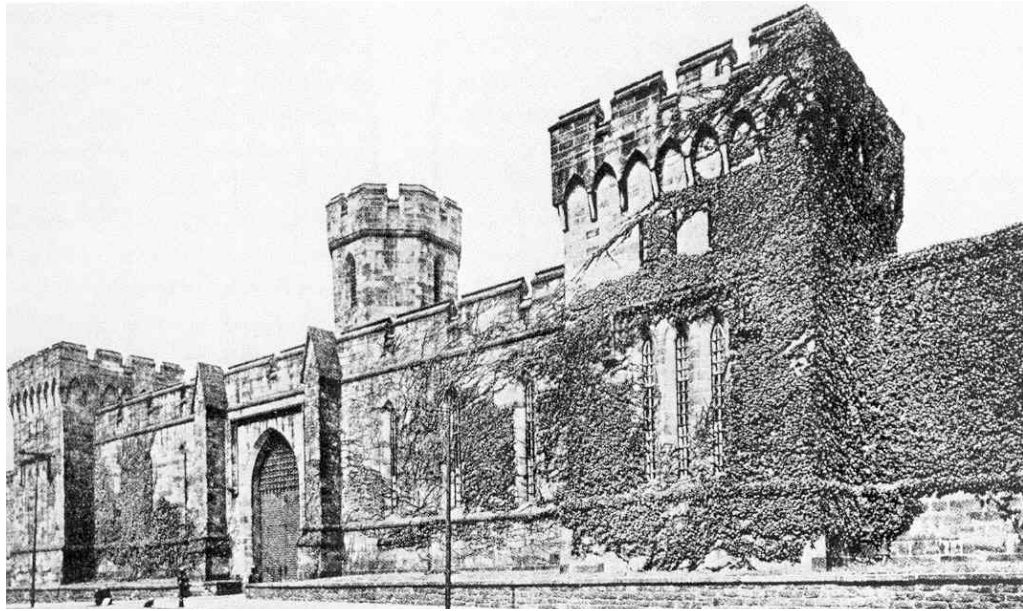


Figure 24. *Ivy-Covered Eastern State Penitentiary Wall.*

Recent photographic image of Eastern State Penitentiary as preserved and enhanced historic site.⁹³

From an oblique angle, Figure 25 shows the broken planes of the center of the façade better exhibiting the pier buttresses, a feature of Gothic architecture, on either side of the entrance as well as the higher octagonal central tower at the back of the administrative building, gesturing further to the Gothic. In 1829, when the prison opened, the second floor of this central tower, seen peeking over the shorter flanking towers, housed the apothecary and above that level, the structure served no practical purpose except to house an alarm. This view also shows the symmetry of the two fifty-foot towers topped by crenellated parapets supported by a series of corbels rhythmically repeating the pointed arches of the fenestration and the pointed arch of the doorway. The organization of ornamental features emphasizes the image of strength and security by employing Gothic morphologies in a neoclassical methodology of symmetry.

⁹³ Johnston, 103.

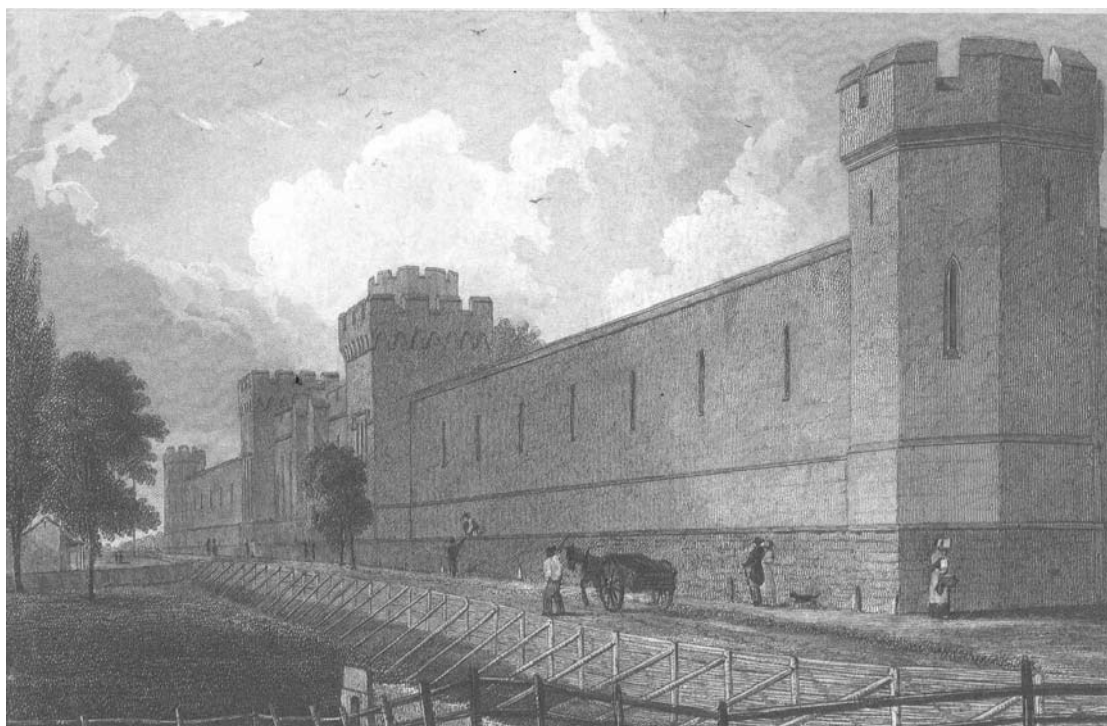


Figure 25. *Eastern State Penitentiary Oil Painting.*

Here is another pastoral image of the prison. Inclusion of citizens in this instance suggests that the prison is integrated into everyday life rather than drawing attention to itself as a touristic spectacle. These citizens are going about their everyday business and are dressed in work clothes rather than dressed up for a Sunday stroll or for the special occasion of visiting the penitentiary. There is even a young boy climbing on the knee wall.⁹⁴

Looking more closely at the 1831 engraving in Figure 25, out of scale and incongruent when compared to the human bodies in the photograph in Figure 19, there are small incisions at the base of the knee wall that do not exist in other images or in the wall today. These could have existed at some point for the purpose of ventilation or drainage. It is possible the smaller secondary wall was filled with earth (today a landscaped garden) to cover these incisions, again to enhance security, and then covered entirely with stone at some point.

⁹⁴ Johnston, Front cover.

Before moving inside the prison structure, I will now continue exploring the topic of style to support some ironies and paradoxes existing in the structure. An aesthetic focus will point out incongruence in style and programme and provides a parallel to incongruence in policy and practice, administration and prison culture, and political intentions and social symbolism, analyses critical to understanding the reflective role of architectural style in Eastern State Penitentiary.

CHAPTER 7: PROPOSING THE WALL

As briefly stated earlier in this essay, it is not clear that Haviland included an exterior wall in his original design proposal for Eastern State Penitentiary. There are no documents of his first plan, but minutes from meetings, his own work log and several other documents show that there were changes in his initial proposal. A government appointed entity, the Board of Commissioners for the Erection of a State Penitentiary, put into place by the governor of Pennsylvania, can be considered when looking for the specific reasons or motivations for Haviland's changes in his plan. Records from meetings of the Board of Commissioners show that the board advised Haviland as to the specifications of the wall. The incongruity and isolation of his "neoclassical" (in Johnston's reading) prison building as compared to the prison wall, in both physical separation as well as stylistic divisions, suggests the wall and prison building were not initially designed to fit together in his first plan. At some point in the process, Haviland produced an original design for the wall. It is clear that only after including an exterior wall in his proposal, the commission appointed by the Pennsylvania governor to assign an architect to the project asked Haviland to modify his proposal for the wall's design. In the May 1, 1821 minutes of a meeting of the Board of Commissioners for the Erection of a State Penitentiary,⁹⁵ Peter Meicken, James Thackara, Caleb Cornwall, Thomas Sparks, John Bacon, Samuel R. Wood and Thomas Bradford proposed the preferred nature of a primary prison wall. Referencing the seventh, fifth and third acts of assembly, an assembly member (not named in the minutes) reiterated that the wall "shall contain [between eight and twelve acres] and be

⁹⁵ Loc 1-3465, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg PA.

no more than 2 1/2 miles from the State House.”⁹⁶ Continuing, another un-named member stated that the prison ...

shall continue on the plan of the Pittsburgh penitentiary with improvements approved by the commissioners who may from time to time approve and direct, with the approbation of the Governor and whereas it is necessary to obtain as much information on the subject as is practical in order to decide on the propriety of making such alterations and improvements of said plan therefore be it resolved that proposals be issued inviting architects to furnish on or before the first Monday in July, a Plan of Prisons comprising of 250 solitary cells and to publish advertisements embracing the provisions of the preceeding [sic] resolutions⁹⁷

This was not the first intervention of the board into the process of design. John Haviland as the project architect was not the original choice of the Commission. In a meeting on August fourteenth, records show that it was William Strickland (not John Haviland) who was being seriously considered as the architect to design Eastern State. Strickland had submitted a panopticon plan, using his already constructed Western State Penitentiary in Pittsburgh (referred to in the quote above) as a model for his proposal for the Philadelphia prison. Considering this, it is misleading to claim Eastern State Penitentiary was the *first* penitentiary since Strickland’s Western State Penitentiary opened three years previous to Haviland’s penitentiary in Philadelphia. Perhaps *first* means first penitentiary to remain open for more than seven years, since Haviland’s Pittsburgh penitentiary was razed after only seven years of operation. Reasons for this razing cannot yet been determined from the sources considered for this essay but I will speculate that it did not serve the board of commissioners because it did not exhibit the gothic style.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Notice this dictum contradicts Rush’s advice to have this structure “erected in a remote part of the state.”

⁹⁷ Ibid.

In the change in architects, the commission revised their specifications for the penitentiary wall to be more precise. First, the octagon shape of Strickland's Pittsburgh panopticon plan was rejected even though the shape of the building was not the defining element of a panopticon. The language in the minutes suggests the board was unaware of Bentham's (and certainly not Foucault's) understanding of the defining element of a panopticon, the interior tower as a tool of surveillance. For the board, the main feature of Strickland's panopticon plan was that it included all the cells within the cylinder of the prison wall. The exterior wall of his panopticon was in the shape of a cylindrical octagon. In this model, and for the purposes of the Board of Commissioners, Strickland's prison and wall were one. In the board's interpretation of his panopticon, the wall of cells encircled a courtyard with a guard tower in its center. A rejection of Strickland's panopticon was not necessarily a rejection of the panopticon principle as a plan but rather a rejection of the epiphenomenal shape of the exterior wall necessitated by the function of the panopticon interior (as theorized by Bentham). But most importantly for this essay, in 1821, the commission specified that,

The outer wall should be square instead of [an] octagon, its height to be not less than 30, no more than 34 feet from the surface, the depth of the wall below the surface to be from 8-10 feet and thickness of the wall at the foundation to be not less than 4 nor more than 6 feet and the top not less than 2 nor more than 3 feet, the length of the walls to be not less than 550 nor more than 700 feet on each side.⁹⁸

While shifting from an octagon to a square, the committee only made explicit the quantitative specifications concerning the front of the wall. They could not come to a conclusion on the specifications of the remaining three walls and decided to defer the design of these walls to the tastes of a skilled architect, yet to be determined at the time the above specifications were made. There are no specifications for style stated

⁹⁸ Ibid.

anywhere in the minutes but the design of the other three walls is minimal in relation to a Gothic aesthetic suggesting several points: primarily, either the Gothic was not a style Haviland cared to elaborate in any substantial way or the board requested a Gothic style for the façade. The primary concern of the commission was the prison's principal presentation, the way in which the prison would "perform" for the public. A move from an octagon to a square focused the stylistic design elements on the Cartesian façade rendering the structure more performative. Any choices for the three remaining walls, if not required by the board, would at least be contingent on the approval of the commission. In the rejected panopticon design of Strickland, the wall of the prison and the architectural anatomy of prison cells were bound together in one cylindrical structure. The board meetings minutes show no evidence that they understood the panopticon function as theorized by Bentham. They were only concerned with the operation of the wall as a performative element for a viewing public. There was no peripheral walled structure that was separate, surrounding an interior architectural complex of cells as is seen in Haviland's design. Strickland's design had been the commission's original choice but then they shifted. Strickland's cellular construct signified a solid wall and behaved as a fortress-like construction similar to what had been theorized by Benjamin Rush thirty years previous. On the other hand, Haviland's radial cellular construct building alone, without a wall, presented a more complicated and open design. It is likely the commission preferred Haviland's design for its facility of solitary confinement and adapted Strickland's cellular-wall morphology added it as a detached wall without the cells allowing for a stronger presentation of a façade. This would maintain Haviland's more complex hub and spoke plan that could facilitate solitary confinement but also preserve the imposing wall as a performing signifier to the strolling, visiting or arbitrarily passing public. As previously stated, one of the principal tenets of classical architecture was to

be able to view the volume of the structure from an exterior vantage point. The volume of Haviland's building loses its exterior visual integrity when enclosed in the square structure. The formal performative identity of Eastern State Penitentiary, once the wall was added, came to be about the wall, the *fortress*.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest the influence of the board of commissioners on the design of Eastern State, and that influence extends to the board's influence on the ways in which the structure was perceived by the public, in particular the role of one person on that board who exerted tremendous influence in that realm, Roberts Vaux. Many months of deliberations on materials to be used for the wall of Eastern State occurred before philanthropist Roberts Vaux joined the commission in February 1822. Vaux was to become the board member most closely involved with supervision of the construction of Eastern State Penitentiary. He would also become the most active member in deciding how the prison was to be represented in the press. Vaux's role in the development and public representation of Eastern State brings further into question the veracity of the claim of supremacy of the Pennsylvania system over the New York system. Vaux exhibited his dedication to the Pennsylvania system in a widely published pamphlet⁹⁹ and in his published letter of defense¹⁰⁰ against William Roscoe's defamation of the Pennsylvania system in favor of the Auburn system. The pamphlet included a letter from an "anonymous" prisoner who extolled the virtues of the Pennsylvania system. Most likely, Vaux wrote this letter himself as it written in much the same style as Vaux's credited contributions. The first sentence alone determines the likelihood that Vaux, or someone like him, wrote this letter.

⁹⁹ Roberts Vaux and anonymous prisoner, "Letter on the Penitentiary System of Pennsylvania addressed to William Roscoe, Esquire of..." printed by Jesper Harding, Philadelphia, 1827, in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Much Respected Sir,

In addressing you upon a subject which has been so fully and able canvassed by men of respectability, learning, and eminent talents, I do with humility, being conscious of my own inferiority and want of literary acquirements; but notwithstanding the disadvantages under which I labour, form the want of the powerful auxiliaries, I have the superiority in one important point, which is-the actual suffering and degradation, with the consequent feelings the convict experiences, and of which no man can form an adequate idea save him who suffers.¹⁰¹

In this first sentence it is apparent this was likely written by Vaux as there is no name attributed to the author. This letter was part of a rhetorical defense of the prison system. The author's claim to illiteracy is contradicted by his prose. And it is unlikely a prisoner would have spoken in this way without some coercion by the authorities.

In spite of Vaux's dedication to the cause, eventually Vaux was forced off the board of commissioners in a battle with board chairman, Nicholas Biddle, over an issue completely separate from anything concerning Eastern State Penitentiary. The scuffle referred to a conflict concerning Vaux's allegiance to Andrew Jackson's decision to withdraw support and funds from the Bank of the United States, a financial venture headed by Biddle that eventually failed.¹⁰² This last note of interest is meant to emphasize the political nature of decision making on this board. Vaux came onto the board and seemed to do an adequate if not exceptional job, but was eventually ousted for reasons that had little to do with his job duties. I am offering this example to suggest that many decisions made by this board were capricious and in my search for connections between many of their decisions to the actual agenda of prison making, I found little evidence.

¹⁰¹ Roberts Vaux and "anonymous prisoner," "Letter on the Penitentiary System of Pennsylvania addressed to William Roscoe, Esquire of..." printed by Jesper Harding, Philadelphia, 1827, in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹⁰² Bruce Laurie, "Fire Companies and Gangs in Southwark: the 1840's" *The Peoples of Philadelphia, A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower-Class Life, 1790-1940*, editors, Allen F. Davis and Mark H. Haller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973).

Returning to the design competition of Eastern State Penitentiary, after a primary submission, on February 12, 1822, the more prominent and successful architect, William Strickland returned from a trip viewing prisons in England, Scotland and France. It is unclear if the board funded his travel but it is unlikely. Three days after his arrival in Philadelphia, he met with the Board of Commissioners on February 26, 1821. At this meeting, the board accepted Strickland's revised European-inspired design. But by the March 5, 1821 board meeting, another architect was being considered, John Haviland. Haviland had also altered his original proposal to fall in line with the requirements of the board (as stated earlier) to include exact dimensions of the walls of the individual cells as well as the separate structure of the exterior wall. In his revised design, Haviland delivered precise widths and depths as well as cost estimates and labor hours required to construct the walls. He also provided explanations of how the dimensions of the proposed walls would prevent escape as well as preventing communication between prisoners. Although Haviland's original plans no longer exist, there are some secondary drawings by observers and these are considered to be the closest available documents to Haviland's original designs.¹⁰³

French architect Abel Blouet, visited the United States ten years after the prison had opened for the purpose of viewing and analyzing American prisons. On his visit, he created detailed drawings of the site including an elevation as seen in Figure 26. While not executed by Haviland, Blouet's drawings are the images most directly connected to the structure at that time. In the absence of original plans by Haviland, Blouet's work acts as the closest representations of Haviland's original lost documents. Incongruencies between representations of Haviland's plan can be seen in a comparison of Blouet's work to that of another draughtsman, William Crawford,

¹⁰³ Johnston, 35.

who created drawings of the site before Bloet's visit (Figure 27) and of course to the most recent plan of the metastasized structure shown in Figure 28.

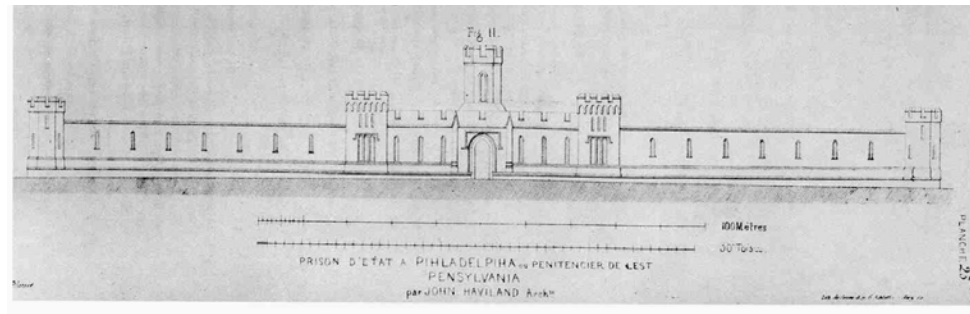


Figure 26. *Blouet's Elevation, Eastern State Penitentiary.* Elevation detail from plan and elevation, Blouet, 1837: the entire front façade of Eastern State Penitentiary.¹⁰⁴

There is no evidence that Haviland debated with the commission on the remaining three walls but in any case, they were to eventually be constructed with no ornamental windows, parapets or battlements as are seen in the façade. The two back corner towers were built as truncated versions of the two front corner towers and were also inoperative other than as aesthetic ornament. The exclusion of ornamental fenestration and reduced design of the ornamental back towers emphasizes the intended performance of the front façade. The part of the building that is most presentational to the public is symbolically ornamental, performing for an audience like a proscenium stage rather than engaging with any practical prison function.

In addition to Blouet, another foreign visitor who had come to Eastern State for a similar purpose was Britain's William Crawford. He visited Eastern State in 1833 to view the prison for the English government. While having been opened four years earlier, the construction of Eastern State was not yet finished by his visit. Although only partially completed, Crawford's observations show that proposed changes to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 42.

Haviland's plan had already been suggested and implemented at least in plan (Figure 27). Initially, according to Haviland's intent, all the cellblocks were to be equal in length. But even before the opening of the penitentiary the need for more cells was demanded by the growing urban site within the growing nation of America. The ensuing demand became more than what Haviland had initially projected. There were more inmates than Haviland ever anticipated and a solution extended some of the yet-to-be-built cell blocks both horizontally and vertically. Two-story additions destroyed Haviland's original individual cell with individual yard plan. A second story cell could not have an individual exercise yard (see Figure 29).

The predetermined size of the outer wall from the original plan and construction limited the vertical extension of a cell block. This limitation correlated with the way in which Haviland had sited his interior structure, allowed only four of the seven spokes to be extended before running up against the exterior wall, yet another incongruity emerged from the organically metastasizing structure. Blouet's depiction recorded six years later accurately shows the asymmetry of the finished plan of 1837 seen in Figure 12 and in the darkened portion of the twentieth-century plan of the metastasized structure as seen in Figure 28.

Crawford on the other hand, four years earlier, had depicted an extension of four of the wings seen in Figure 27. If this plan had been accomplished, the wings would not have been equal to one another but as a whole; the design would have been bilaterally symmetrical reflecting the symmetry of Haviland's original plan. There is no evidence as to why the changes were finally constructed asymmetrically as recorded by Blouet as opposed to the altered symmetry as projected by Crawford. Haviland did not execute either of these plans, so it is difficult to determine if these changes were not actually intended by Haviland or if the individual wings were simply never completed due to budgetary constraints.

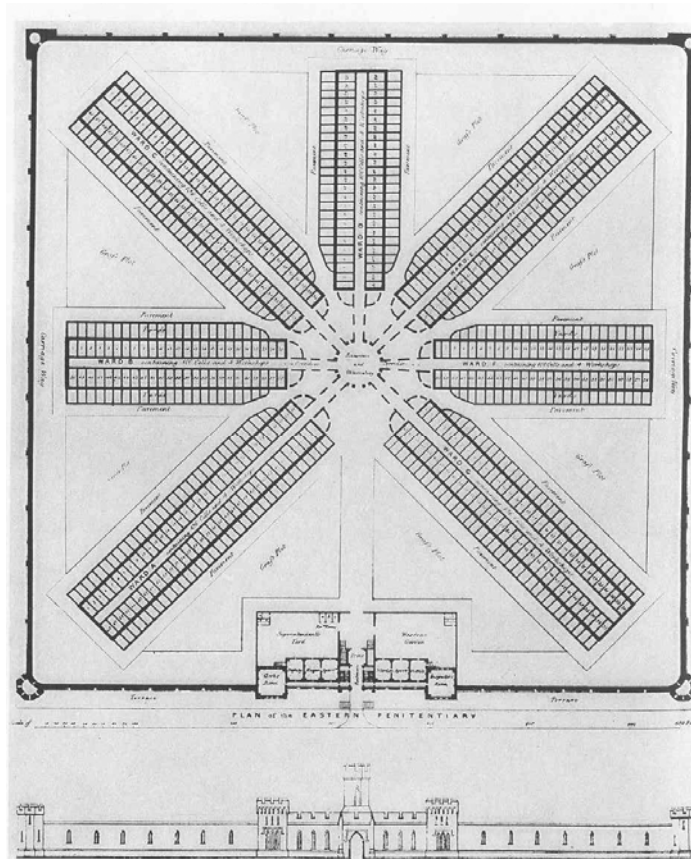


Figure 27. *Crawford's Plan and Elevation, Eastern State Penitentiary.* This representation exhibits a uniform extension of the radial spokes rather than the asymmetry seen in both Blouet's plan (Figure 12) and Haviland's finished structure.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Teeters, 68.

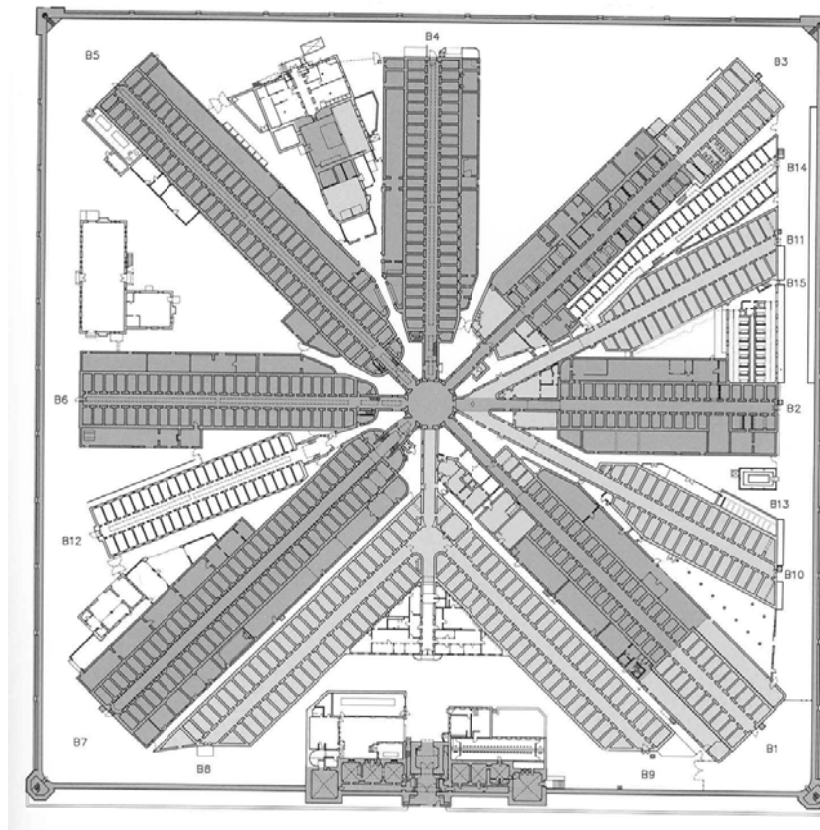


Figure 28. *Metastasized Plan of Eastern State Penitentiary.*

Recent plan of the penitentiary including all of the organic extensions prepared for museum exhibit.¹⁰⁶

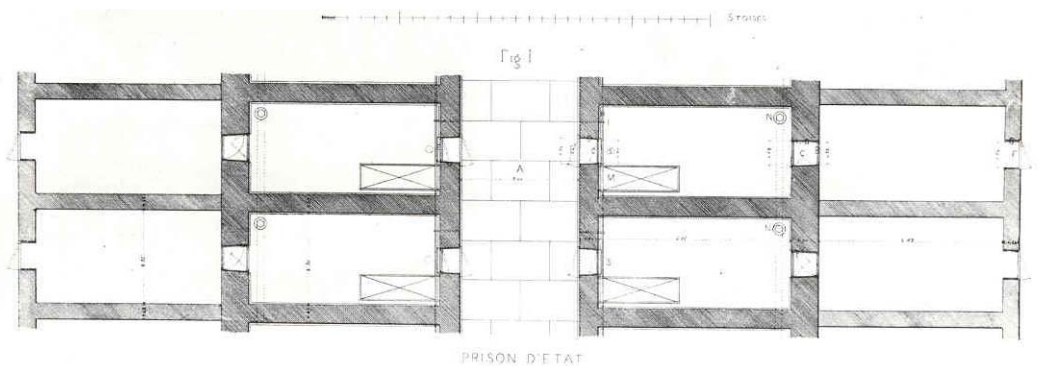


Figure 29. *Eastern State Penitentiary Cell Plan Detail.*

Plan of first story cells with exercise yards, soon to be abandoned due to overcrowding.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Johnston, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Johnston, 41.

As seen in Figure 27 and Figure 28, over the years there were numerous changes to Haviland's original plan. Another significant change in Haviland's original design, nearly one hundred years after it opened and referred to early in this essay, concerns the façade and entrance to the prison.



Figure 30. *Front Gate Addition Interior View.*

Image of the new second gate as seen looking towards the inside the prison¹⁰⁸

In the administration building behind the portcullis is an atrium. A second gate was added in front of this in 1924, creating a vestibule that partitioned the entry into

¹⁰⁸ Johnston, 80.

the prison yard. In this way a vehicle could be sequestered between the two gates to prevent escapes or smuggling of contraband (Figure 18 and Figure 30).

The original portcullis can be seen in the background and the central hub can be seen beyond the original gate.

A Cleansing Ritual of Entry into Civic Death

In the administration building on either side of the entry gate there are two symmetrical apartments (Figure 31). On the right, marked “5,” is the warden’s office (also Figure 32) and on the left, marked “6,” is superintendent’s office. These two wings extended to both sides from the vestibule. Each apartment contained three small rooms and one larger room. There was also a garden or yard in the back of each apartment.

Figure 32 is the interior of the warden’s office which is to the left of the central tower when viewed from the point of view in Figure 31. Seated is Warden Cassidy, at home (he lived there) in his office above the interrogation rooms. He ran the prison from 1881 to 1890. His records, in particular, his photographs, are a more complete visual and textual record of the penitentiary than that of any other warden. Unfortunately, at the time of researching this essay, Warden Cassidy’s records, housed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg, had been damaged in a flood. Access to the files is still being withheld as the documents sit in a freezer awaiting a preservationist who can properly restore them.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Teeters, 157.

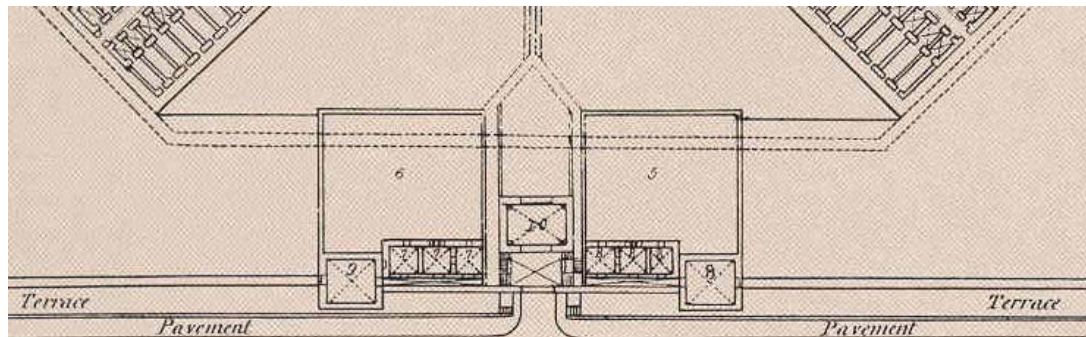


Figure 31. *Eastern State Penitentiary Plan Detail.*
A close-up detail of the plan of Eastern State Penitentiary in engraving by C. G. Childs.¹¹⁰



Figure 32. *Warden Cassidy's Office.*

The first small room, to the left in Figure 31, is where the prisoner disrobed and where his hair was closely shaved. The second room was where the prisoner's naked body was washed. In the third room, he was provided with his prison uniform

¹¹⁰ Johnston, 42.

that included a black hood to be worn (Figure 33) as he was brought through the prison yard to his cell to prevent his being recognized by anyone, or his recognizing anyone else. This practice was also intended to prevent his gaining knowledge of the layout of the prison as a preventive measure against potential escapes. In Figure 33, the hood is white rather than black but is just as chillingly effective an image. The practice of placing hoods over the prisoner's head continued until 1904.

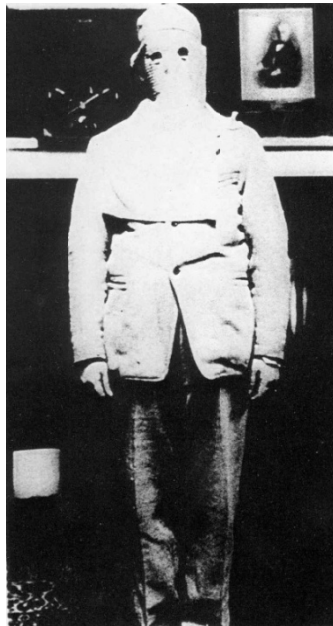


Figure 33. *Nineteenth-century Eastern State Penitentiary Inmate.*
Image of hooded prisoner.¹¹¹

Charles Dickens comments on this practice in his *American Notes for General Circulation* written in 1842 after Dickens had visited Eastern State. “Over the head and face of every prisoner who comes into this melancholy house, a black hood is drawn; and in his dark shroud, an emblem of the curtain dropped between him and the free or civic living world, he is led to his cell from which he never again comes forth,

¹¹¹ Johnston, 48.

until his whole term of imprisonment has expired.”¹¹² Dickens is suggesting a civic and social death here, an analogy I will pursue further later in this essay after completing the physical description of this experience.

The larger space in the reception area was allotted for extensive interrogation “as to his former life.”¹¹³ It was here also that he was informed of the “design of his punishment”¹¹⁴ and the rules of the prison. He was then led through the courtyard. If he had not been wearing a hood on his head, he could look behind him and view the administration building from inside the prison walls as seen in the photograph in Figure 34.

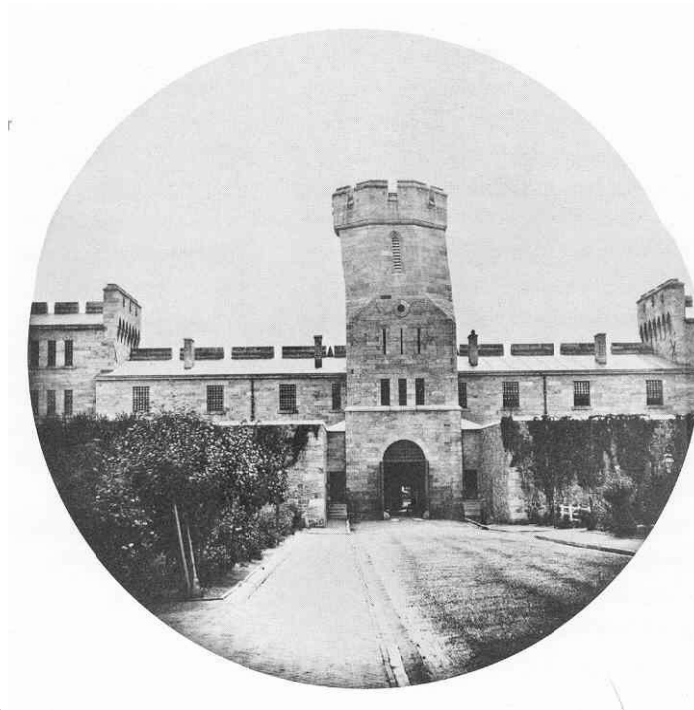


Figure 34. *Administration Building Interior View.*
Image of interior of administration building as viewed from inside the prison wall.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Dickens, 241.

¹¹³ Teeters, 76.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Johnston, 101.

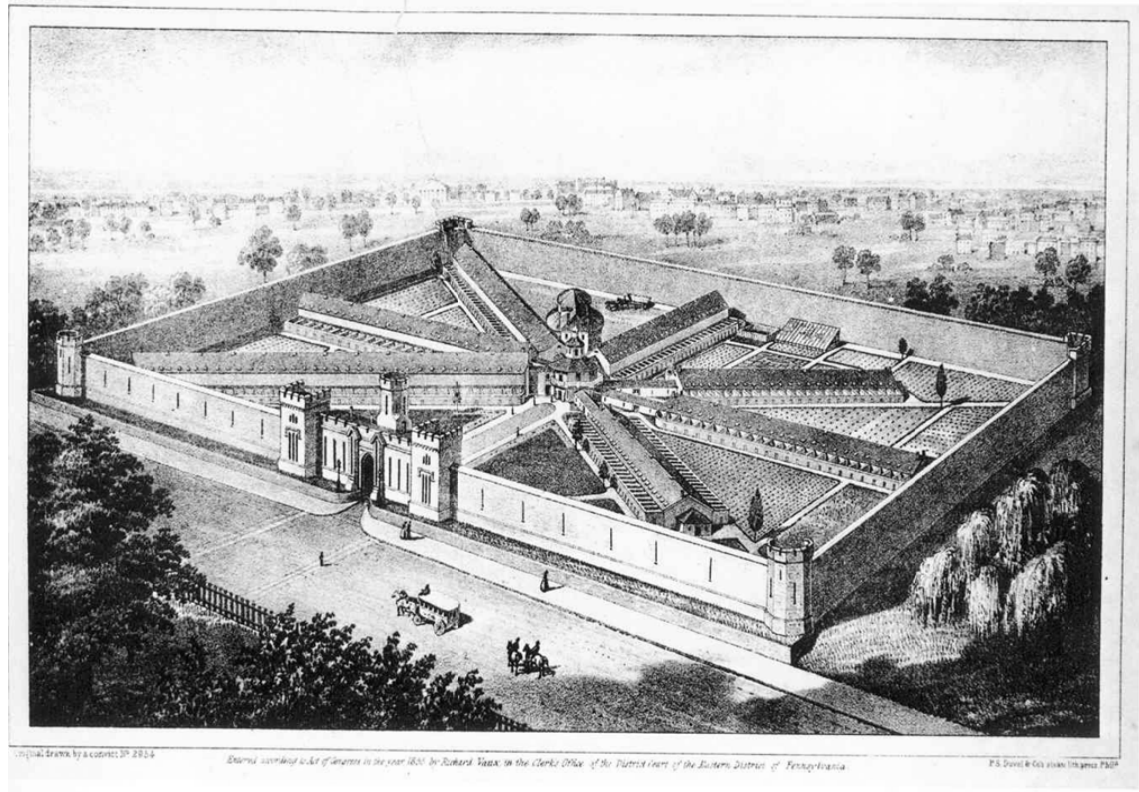


Figure 35. *Eastern State Penitentiary Bird's-eye View.*

At the time of this engraving, there was no actual vantage point available to witness this bird's-eye view of the penitentiary and this is still the case today, as the structure became engulfed in the urban growth of twentieth-century Philadelphia. What is slightly more accurate here is the asymmetry of the wings as described previously in this essay. Notice the wings on the left of this image extend almost to the wall while the wings on the right stop considerably short of the wall.¹¹⁶

With the first portion of the admission completed, the prisoner was now inside the wall. But it was the interior space between the wall and radial cell structure. This is not where he was to live. This space was not visually available to the prisoner as he face was covered with the hood. He was led through this space as though he was blind and arrived at his cell which he entered through an individual exercise yard. A representation of the vastness of the unreconciled spaces between the wall and the cellular structure can be seen in Figure 35.

¹¹⁶ Johnston, 45.

CHAPTER 8: MOVING INSIDE, THE PENITENTIAL PROCESSION

Theoretically, once inside the yard, without the hood, the prisoner would have been able to turn around and observe the central administrative tower as seen from inside the prison yard and incorrectly rendered in the bird's-eye view shown in Figure 35. The second-story served as the apothecary's shop, the room with the three wider windows, below the three narrow openings. The three narrow slit windows were entirely inoperative. The single highest fenestration near the top was a shuttered opening intended for ventilation and would have been a watchtower had it been built as such. But this space served only as an opening to allow the sound of the alarm to be heard in the yard. To the left, the second story contained the warden's apartment (Figure 31). To the right, on the second floor, was the superintendent's office.

After the prisoner was interrogated and his head was covered with the hood, he was then led to his new temporary home through the open-air courtyard. An irony of this unreconciled, open air space is that it was only seen by guards and administrators, not to observe what a prisoner's body might be doing, as in panopticon surveillance, but rather to determine the spaces emptiness, or lack of prisoner bodily presence. This empty space was under surveillance by guards but to a minimal degree. Amplifying the emptiness of the unreconciled space was the interior surface of the massive wall. As seen in Figure 36, the interior wall was left unfinished and jagged and reveals that the closed off windows in the wall seen from the outside did not have an interior counterpart.



Figure 36. *Guard Tower Addition IV and Interior Wall.*
An image of the interior surface of the wall taken April, 2009.¹¹⁷

As previously described, the façade fenestration when seen from the outside appears to have been sealed off. But as explained in reference to Figure 17, that gesture is ornamental with no equivalent on the interior wall. While the exterior wall surface showed smooth cut and hewn granite punctuated by fenestration, the interior of that wall was jagged and rough with no sign of any windows. The prisoners were never intended to visually experience the space between the wall and the interior building. It wasn't until many years after the opening of Eastern State that the interior yard spaces were assigned program such as a picnic area or sharply angled baseball "diamond."¹¹⁸ As discussed earlier, these empty spaces were unreconciled spaces both

¹¹⁷ Marcantonis.

¹¹⁸ This empty space eventually was used for group recreation activities but even the baseball diamond appears to have been squeezed into the space.

as a reflection of the unreconciled structures of wall and interior building and as a reflection of the unreconciled nature of prison policy and practice. But further, these spaces were unreconciled in the way in which they did not exist in any tangible way for the early prisoners, an unrecognizable void between the cell and the wall, rendering the tangibility of that separation as a empty space. This spatial void also disabled public witnessing of the interior cellular structure by the non-incarcerated passerby. Most touristic visitors would have most likely viewed Haviland's interior building from inside that building, from the hub (Figure 37 and Figure 38). There is evidence of only a few select visitors having been allowed into individual cells, but records do not show what tendencies existed for the thousands of other visitors in those first few years. Inmates were not allowed any visitation as it is understood in the twentieth century.

In the large open-air courtyard, if it were not for the hood over his head, the prisoner could have looked forward to see an exterior view of the hexagonal central rotunda encircled by a second story gallery (Figure 37 and Figure 38). A simple wooden balustrade was most likely ornamental as its only purpose could have been to protect the guards from falling off the balcony, an unlikely occurrence.

The central hub is covered by a hexagonally hipped roof with eaves extending to the edge of the balcony. The roof also supports another hexagonal vented cupola. The shuttered cupola supports a smaller hexagonal ornamental glass fenestrated cupola. A small spherical hexagonal lantern ornaments the top of this structure also capped by an even smaller hipped roof with a spherical finial extending upwards from the center. All of this, while simple in design, is stylistic and ornamental and is of no practical use.



Figure 37. *Eastern State Penitentiary Rotunda Exterior View.*
The rotunda as seen from the administration building entrance.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Johnston, 78.

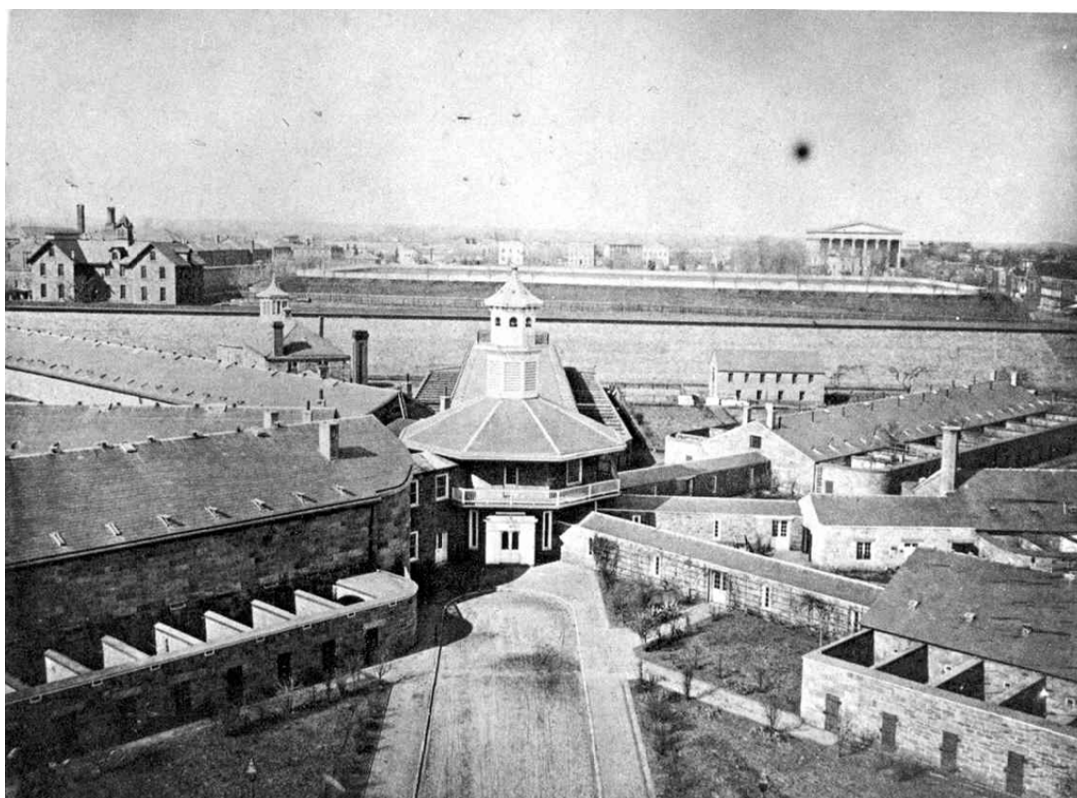


Figure 38. *Eastern State Penitentiary Rotunda Bird's-eye View.*

Undated birds-eye photograph of courtyard and exercise yards as seen from the central tower of the entry way. The interior yard spaces in between the radials had been filled in with other structures and uses, that were in no part included in the original plan.¹²⁰

Figure 39 is an image of one of the exterior spaces between the radial spokes in one of its later uses. By this time solitary confinement as a universal practice in the prison had been discontinued. Having visited these spaces myself in recent years, I will maintain that even though used, these spaces remained unreconciled in that they were never intended for use and the sharply triangulated spaces that came to be used for picnic benches, a baseball yard, a greenhouse and other such programmes, were clearly not designed for this use.

¹²⁰ <http://www.easternstate.org/> (accessed April 16, 2009).



Figure 39. *Interior View, “Unreconciled” Yard Space.*¹²¹

Upon arrival to his cell, the penitent, with his head covered, would be led through the empty space of the courtyard, along the exterior of one of the radial spokes emanating from the central rotunda. He would enter his new state assigned home by way of the prison yard, passing through a small individual exercise yard and into his private individual cell.

It was in this solitary cell where the prisoner was “left to the salutary admonition of a reproving conscience and the reflections which solitude usually produces.”¹²² The plan of the individual cells seen in Figure 40 and the bird’s-eye photograph of the prison yard and a portion of the exercise yards in Figure 38 show the door from the larger prison yard into the individual exercise yard. There is then a

¹²¹ <http://www.easternstate.org/> (accessed April 16, 2009).

¹²² Teeters, 76.

second door that opens to the individual exercise yard leading into the individual cell. These doors can be seen in Figure 39 leading from the triangular yard into the individual exercise yards.

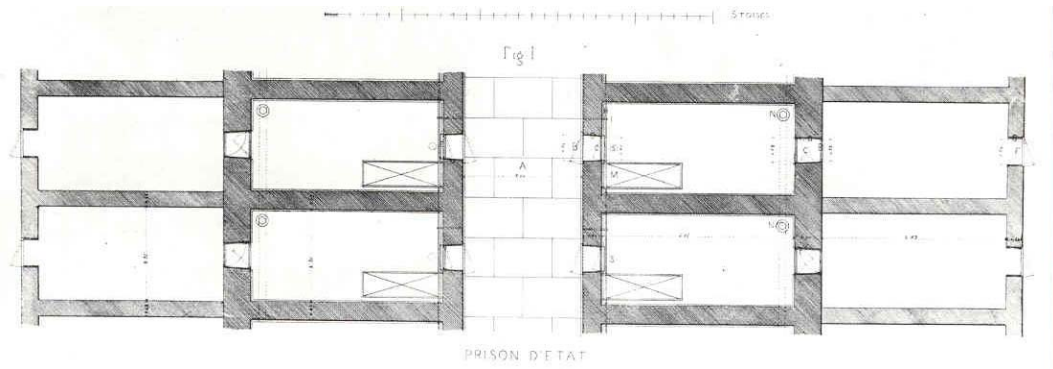


Figure 40. *Eastern State Penitentiary Cell Plan Detail.* Plan of first story cells with exercise yards, soon to be abandoned due to overcrowding.¹²³

As originally planned, there was no door into the interior main corridor of the cellblock. This was quickly rectified as food delivery and maintenance of prisoners was inconvenient for the guards under the original plan.

Negley Teeters describes the individual exercise yard and cell in his book on Eastern State, *The Prison at Philadelphia, Cherry Hill*.

At the time the prison was first used, the only opening to the cell was through the exercise yard; there was none from the corridor. There were two doors covering one doorway leading from the yard into the cell. An inner lattice door was provided to admit air and sunlight as well as to secure the inmate when he was not exercising. An outer door of heavy planking which served to confine the prisoner in his cell closed over the lattice door. These doors were in the rear of the cell. Ventilation and sunlight were provided in each cell by a convex reflector piercing the ‘barrel ceiling’ thus forming a window eight inches in diameter and called by the architect a deadeye. If an unruly prisoner

¹²³ Johnston, 41.

had to be punished his cell could easily be darkened by placing a cask over the deadeye.¹²⁴

Haviland's term for the skylight was the "deadeye" (Figure 41). This fenestration, unique to Eastern State Penitentiary, was also referred to as the "eye of god," referring to the belief that when in solitary confinement the only entity the prisoner communicated with, apart from himself, was with God.¹²⁵ It is perplexing that the prisoner could be punished by covering this "eye of god" and symbolically limiting his access to God. In this solitary communication between God and transgressor, the legislators and administration stated that "the retrospect of life becomes a horrible and loathsome subject of reflection-the sense of shame and feelings of remorse drives them to some source of consolation, and the ordinary means of stifling an actively reproving conscience being denied by reason of their solitariness, the comforts of the Bible and the peace of religion are eagerly sought for."¹²⁶

The isolation of the prisoner, both visual and physical, is reflected in the visual and physical isolation of Haviland's interior structure. Haviland's "deadeye" or the "eye of god" (Figure 41) is seen casting limited light into the cell now in ruin. This image was taken after the prison had been abandoned. There are many cells in the prison museum today that are kept in this state of non-maintenance.

The plan of the interior building shows the central hub with seven radiating spokes containing a row of cells and exercise yards on each side of the corridor (Figure 42). The direction key in the bottom right corner of the plan demonstrates how the entire structure was built slightly off a north/south axis.

¹²⁴ Teeters, 69.

¹²⁵ Dan Cruikshank, in BBC television series, *Adventures in Architecture*, aired on BBC2 April 2008; aired on BBC America, February 2009.

¹²⁶ *Journal of the Senate of Pennsylvania*, 1832-33, II, 509.



Figure 41. *Eye of God*.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Margaret Straton, "Detained in Purgatory," in *Contact Sheet* (Syracuse, NY: Light Work, 2001).

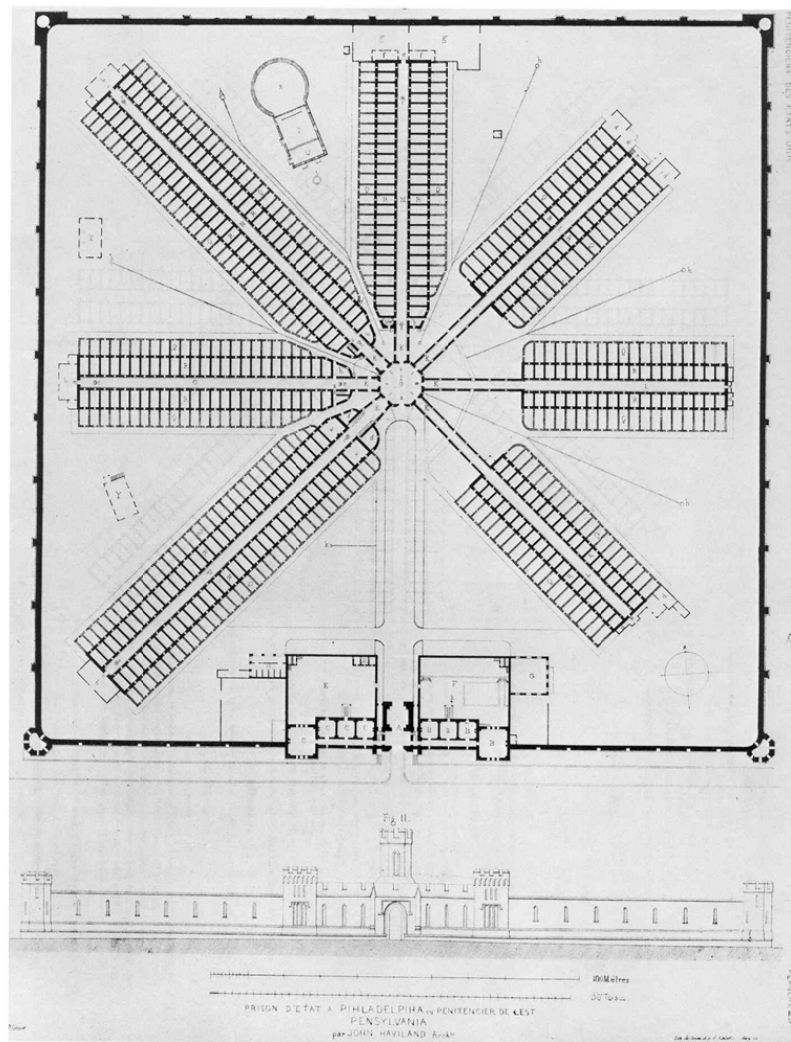


Figure 42. *Blouet's Eastern State Penitentiary Plan.*¹²⁸

The photograph in Figure 43 was taken on the cross section of a north/south axis. Looking at the structure after it was swallowed by the encroaching city, it is clear that Philadelphia's urban grid was also not built precisely along a north/south axis, but to even a greater degree seen together, the tilt emphasizes the off-kilter position of the Eastern State Penitentiary in the cityscape. This is an unintentionally symbolic

¹²⁸ Johnston, 42.

coincidence. Eastern State Penitentiary as a whole is an unreconciled space within the space of urban Philadelphia.



Figure 43. *Eastern State Penitentiary Photographic Bird's-eye View.*

This is a modern postcard image of Eastern State. There are several souvenirs one can purchase in the Eastern State Museum Gift Shop: pencils, mugs, t-shirts, refrigerator magnets and the like.¹²⁹

Discomfort within the prison was intentional, as confirmed in James McElwee's Report in 1835. He is speaking of prisoners in this excerpt.

They reject from sad experience, the daydreams of the sages who, amidst the very bosom of society, have prated about the charms of loneliness. Existence has no charms unless witnessed by, or enjoyed with, our fellow men. The convicts feel it so. Ennui seizes them, every hour is irksome, and they supplicate for the means of employment with the most abject humility. They consider labour as a favor, not as a punishment and they receive it as such. They are furnished a Bible, some religious tracts, and occasionally other works, calculated to imbue their minds with moral and religious ideas.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Postcard from Eastern State Penitentiary Gift Shop.

¹³⁰ *McElwee's Report*, 13.

It was here that the policy of solitary confinement was to do its job, on the soul and the body of the carceral figure. Like the speculative description of the prisoners' experience as proposed above, this essay will fail to exhibit the actual voice of any individual prisoner. This is an intentional failure as it reflects the ambivalence of the system to punish or rehabilitate. The system failed to do either and the prisoner experience is one that is left unreconciled. Left alone, the patient/criminal was intended to experience a prescribed *treatment* for his ailment of social transgression. The severity of this form of punishment was explored by author, Bob Drury (Figure 44) in an article for *Men's Health Magazine* in 2003.¹³¹ While today this might be termed "dystopic," at the time this was a utopic desire,¹³² to rehabilitate through punishment. This was a medical methodology prescribed by Benjamin Rush. How it came to be determined as the most appropriate treatment in rehabilitating social transgressors in the new republic can be directly traced to Rush.¹³³ The methodology of this new type of incarceration came from outside an actual lived, carceral space. It came from outside the social class that became most closely identified as the criminal class. It came from outside the yet to be constructed penitentiary walls.

At this point it should become clear to the reader that the policies and provisions developed by the various creators of this prison, from Benjamin Rush, to the Board of Commissioners for the Erection of a State Penitentiary, to the architect, John Haviland, were out of line with any possible goal of rehabilitation. More

¹³¹ Bob Drury, "Let's Kill Bob" in *Men's Health Magazine* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, October 2003) .

¹³² Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ : Humanities Press ; London : Macmillan, 1984). The term utopic is used here as Louis Marin defines it in his text *Utopics: Spatial Play*, as an effort to reconcile irreconcilable differences.

¹³³ Ignatieff, Michael, *A Just Measure of Pain : the Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*, (New York; Pantheon Books, 1978), 147; and for further descriptions of Rush's attitudes about incarceration see; Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron cages: race and culture in nineteenth-century America* (New York: Knopf ; distributed by Random House, 1979). Rush punished his own children with solitary confinement in his own domestic space. His son John preferred beatings rather than be put into domestic solitary confinement. Rush states that the pain incurred in solitary confinement was greater than that incurred in bodily punishment and therefore more effective as a punishment.

important, it seems, was the goal of punishment. Putting the terms into an historical context could show that the terms were not necessarily considered contradictory but that one led to the other or that they were at least inextricably bound to one another. But in retrospect, the policy of solitary confinement intended by Eastern State produced more insanity in the prisoners than penitence.¹³⁴ The plan of this penitentiary was off its axis of rehabilitation from the beginning.



Figure 44. *Let's Kill Bob*.
From *Men's Health Magazine* illustrating the first installment of "Let's Kill Bob."¹³⁵

If adhered to, solitary confinement proves to be psychologically damaging to almost anyone. One of the more provocative accounts is Drury's account in *Men's Health Magazine*. This issue began a series of articles called "Let's Kill Bob." (Figure 44). The premise is that Bob Drury would receive assignments to experience first hand various stressful and sometimes dangerous environments or activities. The first

¹³⁴ Drury, 63.

¹³⁵ Drury, 63.

assignment was a four-day stay in the then shuttered Eastern State Penitentiary. Bob agreed to the assignment flippantly and was told he was to be treated in the same way prescribed for the original inmates. This included having his head covered as he was led to his cell, a practice instigated in the nineteenth century to protect the identity of the inmate while promoting a shield against contamination through communication between prisoners. Drury lasted about twelve hours before becoming greatly disturbed. At one point, he even reached a state of hallucination. The point of this story in a men's health magazine was not to address the prison problem, but to use prison as a metaphor for social isolation, general depression and to state that "men have feelings too." In his article, Drury states that with the aid of modern science, we also learn that there are hormonal changes that occur when humans experience the stress of isolation. These hormonal shifts can result in physical damage resulting in such ailments as heart attacks. But it is isolation and solitary confinement that gave Eastern State Penitentiary its claim to fame. Does that make Eastern State a site of trauma even if prison records would dispel any suspicion of trauma? Physician reports from the first few months are suspect as the prison was under great pressure to succeed. A great deal of speculation can be made concerning this issue but will be included in a later installment of this project.

CHAPTER 9: TOURISM: VISITING THE PENITENTIARY

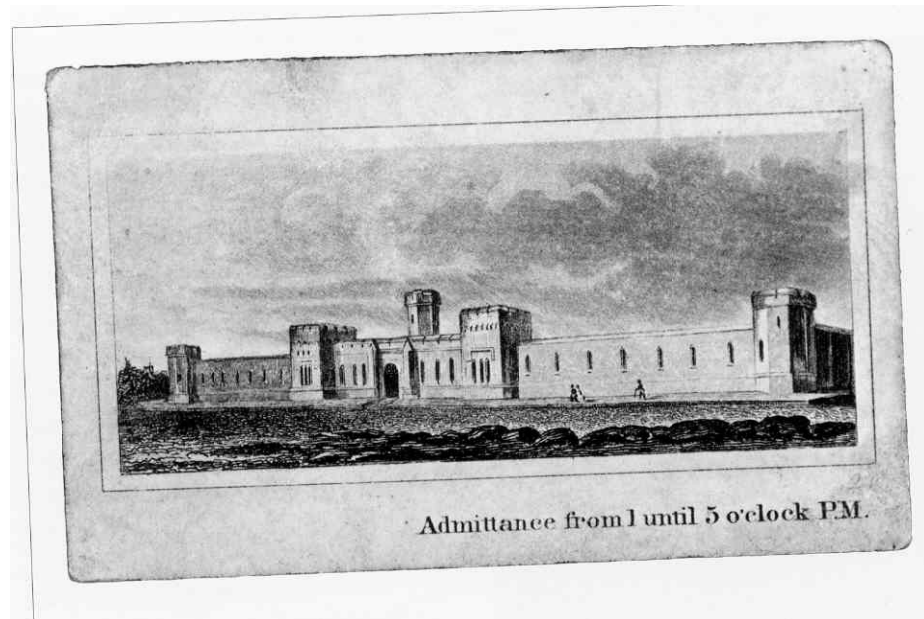


Figure 45. *Admission Ticket.*

Admission ticket to the penitentiary from the year 1835, six years after the penitentiary opened. This admission ticket combined with records from a visitors log (the Register of Visitors) shows that there were visitors allowed into the prison and there was some kind of protocol related to visits but the nature of those visits and what they represent (especially in relation to the practice of solitary confinement) is not clear.¹³⁶

Today Eastern State Penitentiary is a museum and national historic landmark. But it has always been a site of tourism. While tourism can't be assumed to be a transhistorical concept, early tourism at Eastern State in the decades after it was open was most definitely quite different in tone than it is at the site today, a self-admitted tourist site, an historical museum. Eastern State first opened as a penitentiary at the end of 1829. For that year, apart from those who were incarcerated, there are 26 names signed in the Register of Visitors (not prisoners but for all intents and purposes, tourists) book for that year. The next year shows 156 names in the register. This is not

¹³⁶ Johnston, 58.

actually an increase since the first year only includes October, November and December. 1831 shows a decrease in visitors, down to 111. A slight increase occurs in 1832, up to 127 names, then a marked decrease to 75 names in 1833, and to only 60 names in 1834. In 1835, a sharp increase raising the total up to 1108. This is the year historian Norman Johnston assigns to the admission ticket shown in Figure 45. The following year the number of visitors almost doubles, bringing the total up to 2062. There is a steady increase over the next few years, topping off at 4000 visitors in 1839.¹³⁷

Obviously, the spatial experience of a visitor in these first few years would have been quite different from that of a prisoner as described above in this essay. First, there would assuredly be no effort to place a hood over the head of a touristic visitor coming to Eastern State Penitentiary. It is possible that the visitors entered into one of the chambers of the administration building to sign in and to perhaps be given some information about the structures, as talking within earshot of the prisoners would have likely been prohibited once inside the interior structure. It is also likely that the visitors would have been led directly through the yard to the ground floor of the central hub. This was probably the extent of the tour, unless the visitor was a clergy or had received special permission to actually go into a cell to observe or speak with a prisoner in his cell.¹³⁸ There are very few records of this extensive a visit so it is reasonable to conclude that visitors simply stood quietly in the central hub, the rotunda, and peered down the few corridors that had been constructed in these early years. If the tourists moved into the corridors at all they would most likely have been

¹³⁷ Eastern State Penitentiary's *Visitors Register*, Pa State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

¹³⁸ There are records of these visitors but they are few and they are esteemed. Already mentioned is Charles Dickens.

required to wear felt boots over their shoes. It was the practice of the guards to wear felt boots to silence their footsteps as well.¹³⁹



Figure 46. *Rotunda Interior View, Eastern State Penitentiary.* Interior of the rotunda peering down into one of the corridors with very limited views down two other corridors.¹⁴⁰

The image in Figure 46 was taken in the 1890's, much later than the opening of the prison, and also at a point when the initial construction had been completed for at least fifty years. While simple in design and furnishings, the floor of the centralized rotunda is finished hardwood with either a simple wood or stone inlay in the middle. The radiating design of the entire floor extends throughout the central space, the wood planks fanning out from the core axis, towards each of the elongated corridors. It was only possible to see down the full length of one corridor at a time, from any specific point of view, and this photograph gives a foreshortened effect that is not available when making this observation at the actual site.

¹³⁹ Voice of Eastern State Penitentiary, audio tour provided by Eastern State Penitentiary Museum, narrated by Steve Buscemi. http://www.easternstate.org/exhibits/audio_tour.php

¹⁴⁰ Johnston, 55.

Peering down any of these single corridors produces the same image, no matter the position of the spectator. A repetition of forms punctuates the radial spaces, producing a dizzying rhythmic visual effect. The reiteration of the corridors and each corridor's reiteration of cellular forms produce a spatial experience that is more about the uneventful passage of time rather than the extension of a centralized space. Turning in the precise center of the rotunda reveals the space to be continuously extruded in all directions with no differentiation of one corridor from another (at one point, a three prong corridor was introduced but this is only a slight variation in the monotonous spatial repetition). As the full length of each corridor comes into view, time stretches endlessly into the tightly controlled spaces, controlling time for each individual inhabitant, each corridor held in place by a relatively low lath and plaster arched ceiling. The rotunda and its extruded corridors circulate silence more than space. A circulating silent space connects one cell to another, creating an interior void. Haviland intended for this interior void to exist always in the state of emptiness. Silent thoughts of remorse and contrition were expected to be floating silently in this void, the only ornament to this space being those of lightness and darkness, with the latter being the primary ornament of this dead space. The eternal and seemingly limitless pulling of rehabilitative spatiality into interminable distances, in all directions, echoes the projection of perpetual growth for the perceived need of carceral environments.

Many upon visiting this space or even hearing a description of the site, assume it is a panopticon, as described by Michel Foucault in his text *Discipline and Punish*.¹⁴¹ But the appropriate moniker for the design of Eastern State Penitentiary is the radial plan. The panopticon model is used by Foucault as a metaphor for visual surveillance and control of bodies in society, while visual surveillance of bodies is no part of Eastern State. What is a large part of Eastern State is surveillance and control

¹⁴¹ Foucault, 195-228.

of bodies through sound. Complete and total silence was the plan for this penitentiary. Guards were required to wear felt slippers over their shoes on their rounds to silence even the sound of their footsteps. Each cell had a vaulted ceiling as did the interior corridors so any faint sound was amplified and quickly conveyed back to the central hub. For this system of total aural surveillance and control, I have given Eastern State the moniker of “panauralon,” meaning a space where everything is audible.

Although Johnston refers to this space as Neo-classical, there is nothing concretely demonstrating that claim. A vaulted ceiling along a corridor is a gothic stylization, not a classical one. There are no columns demonstrating any of the orders. Regularity and repetition could be read as classical, but there were seven wings and this would not be a symmetrical, classical use of repetition.

There is little that can be called neoclassical about Eastern State Penitentiary except perhaps its use of light in the structure. But Eastern State’s use of light was concerned with limiting light and can be reckoned more to medieval darkness than any illumination. Any intentional diversion into such formal architecture would not be witnessed (or open to analysis) by a prisoner as his view of the structure was limited to the morphologies contained within his cell. The prisoner was able to see only the interior of his individual cell, a columbarium niche, the inside of an urn of civil death. Any other “touristic” visitor would witness the rotunda and its stupendous view of the spatial protrusion of each of the seven wings. The artifact of Eastern State is a planned and built structure and therefore I am hesitant to evoke the sublime. The sublime is most often utilized to describe overwhelming natural environments without perceptible boundaries. In terms of interminable time, it may be appropriate to summon the sublime if only as a point of reference inducing another example of a contradictory or unreconciled spatial experience. The seemingly interminably protruding cell blocks might metaphorically captivate a touristic audience, while each

individual cell holds captive its individual audience of one. The entire structure while fanning out is more about centripetal, enfolding interior space, not visible exterior form. When considering the genesis of neo-classical revivalism, there is little relationship.



Figure 47. *Feeding Aperture.*

Feeding window from original design, reconstructed by the museum.¹⁴²

A proper columbarium is a structure of a series of vaults lined with recesses for cinerary urns. Columbaria were derived from the concept of a dovecote, a hole in a wall encouraging pigeons to roost. The term came to be used to describe Roman vaults that held cinerary urns. In the English Gothic Revival domestic space Horace Walpole proposed the construction of a columbarium to his architect, Richard Bentley. Walpole requested the openings of each of the columbaria be in the form of a pointed gothic

¹⁴² Johnston, 43.

arch rather than a semi-circular one as used in Roman classical architecture. In the columbaria designed by Bentley and considered by John Chute under the patronage of Walpole, although gothic in design, held classical urns.

The cells lining the vaulted corridors of Eastern State Penitentiary are sealed spaces, symbolic tombs, containing the bodies of criminals who had perished a civic-death. These cells were originally designed with no doorway into the corridor but a feeding aperture (see Figure 47, a reconstruction of one of the feeding apertures) beveled so as to prevent any accidental visual encounters between prisoners if two feeding windows had been left open by accident. So as originally intended, each corridor would have consisted of a series of vaults lined with beveled recesses like the reconstructed for exhibit in the Eastern State Penitentiary museum.

The space between the large exterior wall and the interior radial building, the empty void of the rotunda, the limitless corridors extruded into the distance and the funereal spaces of the cells are, intentionally or not, all unreconciled, unresolved areas, leftover places for leftover people, both categories serving a negative spatial and a negating social purpose. The processional description above ends in the prisoner's cell. To continue a description would be only to imagine the experience of the prisoner. It would be mere speculations because as stated earlier, there are no records of early prisoner experiences told from the point of view of any incarcerated individuals. A physician's report and the warden's report exist, but these are not reliable sources for determining prisoner experience. And on that point we are left with an interminable silence.

CHAPTER 10: THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

“It is an ideological critique of the dominant ideology”

-Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*¹⁴³ -1984

AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
EFFECTS OF PUBLIC PUNISHMENTS
UPON
CRIMINALS,
AND UPON
SOCIETY.

THE design of punishment is said to be,
—1st, to reform the person who suffers
it,—2dly, to prevent the perpetration of
crimes, by exciting terror in the minds of
spectators; and,—3dly, to remove those per-
sons from society, who have manifested, by
their tempers and crimes, that they are unfit
to live in it.

From the first institution of governments,
in every age and country (with only a few
exceptions) legislators have thought that pu-
nishments should be *public*, in order to pre-
duce

(2)

duce the two first of these intentions. It
will require some fortitude to combat an opi-
nion that has been sanctified by such long and
general prejudice, and supported by universal
practice. But truth in government, as well
as in philosophy, is of progressive growth.
As in philosophy, we often arrive at truth by
rejecting the evidence of our senses; so in go-
vernment, we often arrive at it after divorcing
our first thoughts. Reason, though deposed
and oppressed, is the only just sovereign of the
human mind. Discoveries, it is true, have
been made by accident; but they have de-
rived their credit and usefulness only from
their according with the decisions of reason.

In medicine, above every other branch of
philosophy, we perceive many instances of
the want of relation between the apparent
cause and effect. Who, by reasoning *à priori*,
would suppose, that the hot regimen was not
preferable to the cold, in the treatment of the
small-pox? But experience teaches us, that
this is not the case. Cause and effect appear
to be related in philosophy, like the objects
of chemistry. Similar bodies often repel each
other, while bodies that are dissimilar in figure,
weight,

Figure 48. *Rush's Treatise on Punishment.*

The first page of Rush's Rush, Benjamin, "AN ENQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS OF PUYBLIC [sic] PUNISHMENTS UPON CRIMINALS AND UPON SOCIETY, READ IN THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING POLITICAL ENQUIREIES, CONVENED AT THE HOUSE OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ESQ, IN PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 9TH 1787."¹⁴⁴

-Benjamin Rush, "An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and Upon Society" -1787

¹⁴³ Marin, xiv.

¹⁴⁴ Rush, "AN ENQUIRY..."

Eastern State Penitentiary was imagined into existence by men with a simplistic understanding of what the experience would be like for the prisoners who were to be exiled there. Benjamin Rush knew that this experience would be painful, but Rush's understanding of what that pain would or could produce was misguided and carried very little compassion. Rush's potential for understanding was supplanted by a hegemonic superiority that was to prove detrimental to the burgeoning prison community. Eastern State Penitentiary was a space that was produced in theory and in accord with laws that at that point had yet to be fully exercised in the new nation. The nascent system of penology went against traditional modes of punishment that were more fully integrated, both visually and ritually, into daily social life. This imaginary space was produced through debates on public punishment and any manner of visual access to prisoners by the free public. The search for a definitive answer to these debates produced a material yet experimental architectural type, the penitentiary. Eastern State Penitentiary was an experiment within a larger experiment of penology that has lasted for over two hundred years. The space of the penitentiary, like the new nation, was to be a new unexplored world, a separate world, an ideal world, a utopia. In neither case has this come to fruition. But it can be argued that introducing new ways of thinking takes a considerable amount of time. The process that has led to wide acceptance and support of this new world (now not so new) of incarceration is a complex one, one that exploited and continues to exploit the fears of both the elite and common American culture. The creation of a new world (a new nation or new form of incarceration), a new way of dealing with social transgression, required an ideological shift at all levels of society. A shift in theory implemented in this way was to lead to a shift in social practices. Referring to the proposal Rush made in his treatise (Figure 48), he knew this would not be an easy path. Referring to this process he stated, "It

will require some fortitude to combat an opinion that has been sanctified by such long and general prejudice, and supported by universal practice.”

CONCLUSION: UTOPIA

Benjamin Rush's statement, although intended for the opposite goal, could strongly support the goal of this essay, to completely eliminate the prison system. A move as severe as that requires a shift in the dominant ideology of American political, social and cultural thought. In his 1984 book *Utopics: Spatial Play*, Louis Marin refers to the primary goal of writing a literary utopian treatise as being an ideological critique of the dominant ideology. Marin traces the ways in which a utopic texts such as Thomas More's *Utopia*¹⁴⁵ first produces an imaginary space rhetorically that in turn affects the creation of a new and actual pseudo-utopic space.¹⁴⁶ Literature, performance and film are credited in the beginning of this essay as part of the support system of the prison system. These same media representations can be seen as critiques of penology and if used with this goal in mind, can be part of its dissolution. While this goal is an unrealistic one, there are media representations that are moving in that direction. First and foremost in this category is ironically, Eastern State Penitentiary.

Eastern State Penitentiary is no longer in use as a prison. A portion of the site now operates as an historical museum of the prison system. Other portions of the site are used for artist installations on the theme of prison issues such as *Pandemonium*,¹⁴⁷ Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's recent sound installation. The various artist installations have brought up many issues from many perspectives including the points of view of both prisoner activists and victim activists. This ambivalence is a smart one

¹⁴⁵ Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1615. This is where the term "utopia" was first coined. Utopia as a term is ambivalent as it has a double meaning of being a perfect place as well as a non-place. These are not necessarily contradictory terms as a perfect place is impossible so it can only exist in the imagination.

¹⁴⁶ Marin's redundant terminology.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.easternstate.org/exhibits/cardiff/index.html>, "Using the existing elements in the prison cells Cardiff and Miller will produce a percussive site work that is rhythmic and musical at some points and at other times pure sound as if a multitude of people or ghosts have inhabited the hall."

and the present state of the space reflects that ambivalence. According to James E. Young in his text, *The Art of Memory; Holocaust memorials in history*,¹⁴⁸ ambivalence is a necessary aspect of preservation of what he terms “countermonuments.” He is speaking of holocaust sites such as concentration camps, but his words can be applied to the preservation of other sites of trauma such as the preservation of prison space. Ambivalence provokes more than consoles and provocation of questions is more important to realizing a solution while avoiding the danger of reiterating the Final Solution.

Young also advises that these sites of trauma be allowed to disintegrate into ruin as a reminder of the horrors that occurred there and to avoid supporting and extending the principles that created them. A large portion of the site of Eastern State remains in ruin and there is no intention to totally delete this aspect of the site. Eastern State Penitentiary as a museum maintains an attachment of the architectural artifact to its symbolic function while at the same time offering a critique of the larger prison system. Unlike less critically aware prison museums, the staff at Eastern State renders the penitentiary effective as a metaphorical emblem of modernity. Following their offering of a portion of the spaces to artists, the curators and artists begin to elucidate the matrix of meaning and materiality in what can be comprehended as phenomena and epiphenomena within the full production of the larger prison system. The work done there questions the validity of the prison system while acknowledging its presence. Eastern State Penitentiary as a museum critiques the prison system and is helping to bring into ruin the validity of the concept of penology.

In 1787, Benjamin Rush wrote and presented his treatise calling for a move towards private incarceration, away from the custom of public punishment. In this

¹⁴⁸ James E. Young, *The Art of Memory; Holocaust memorials in history* (New York, London: Prestel Publishing, 1994).

move, while he presented a critique of the dominant ideology concerning definitions of punishment, he created through text a new imaginary space that had not previously existed. Penal reformers after Rush, partially in accord with his plan, were successful in transforming the dominant ideology around issues of punishment and were able to build an actual material space that reflected, in part, Rush's propositions. It was named Eastern State Penitentiary and was intended to operate under the practice of solitary confinement. This initial plan was to fail and the plan and the building were immediately altered before the material structure was even finished. In spite of countless failed attempts at reform in both Eastern State Penitentiary as well as the larger prison system, the effort to repair the original plan through penal reform persists through today. Again repeating the basic thesis of this essay, that prisons do not work, begs the question, how does one repair this problem? While a simple statement provokes a simple question, the answer is in no way a simple one.

Instituting a space of incarceration aligned with the theories of Benjamin Rush (also aligned with the formation of the new American republic) came to affect society in ways Rush and these other men of the new republic could never have imagined. This essay is a response (but not an answer) to the efforts of creating the new architectural space of the penitentiary that in spite of unforeseen contradiction to the health and welfare of the prisoner, has persistently grown over the past two hundred years. Like Rush's shift in thinking, this essay is a foray into the attempt to again suggest a change in ideology concerning the concept of criminality and punishment. And being an architectural history master's thesis, this essay is directly pointed to architects. For any architects who are interested in prison building, this essay makes one simple request, to abstain.

Rather than simply criticize endless reform as a failure and the concept of progress as a modernist myth, the ultimate goal of this essay is to assist in the

reparation of some of the pejorative effects of the reforms that led to the construction of solitary carceral space as initially defined by Rush, patronized by the city of Philadelphia, and built by John Haviland. This includes a request to all architects to at least more seriously consider the realm of ethics within their individual architectural practices when opportunities for designing prisons come before them.

Like the work of Rush, but towards a different end, this essay is also a utopic practice in the way it works through text to critique the dominant ideological premise concretized by these early reformers in the architectural device of the penitentiary. This essay has pointed out only a few of the failures of the prison system and how those failures were reified through an architectural aesthetic perspective. Furthermore, this essay gestures towards its reciprocal epiphenomenal social effects. Agreeing with Rush, but for a different effect, I will end by repeating his phrase that calls for ideological shift in how American concerns itself with prison building. “It will require some fortitude to combat an opinion that has been sanctified by such long and general prejudice, and supported by universal practice.”¹⁴⁹ The now long standing practice of designing and building prisons, supported by a long standing prejudice will require great strength to combat and abolish. And as architecture was used as a tool to change ideological understanding of civic punishment, it can be used again to shift the ways our culture thinks about and addresses social transgression. And in this way, architecture can help mend the rupture that American penology created in the production of social space and re-imagine and realize a new spatial production.

¹⁴⁹ Rush, “AN ENQUIRY” 2.

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